Farmers Market Guidance for Safe Operations

Updated: February 21, 2021

Statewide Guidance

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is responsible for publishing guidance for farmers markets that is based on the directives from the Governor’s Office. The guidance specifies what farmers markets need to do in order to be allowed to operate during the Coronavirus pandemic.

"Operating during a pandemic is not business as usual. The market season may be dynamic and subject to change. Prior to making major changes, communicate with your local health department for county specific requirements or restrictions. The operational guidance below may help lower the risk of COVID-19 exposure for the vendors and visitors at your market."

During Phase 1, there is no restriction on the type of vendors that may sell at the market.

The key is to design the farmer market layout to prevent shoppers/visitors from gathering in groups.
- Outdoor farmers markets must ensure 6-feet of physical distancing is maintained between customers/households while they are in the market.
- Indoor farmers markets must limit indoor capacity to 25% (not including employees) in both Phases 1 and 2.

Local Jurisdictions - County Health Departments

In Washington State, local jurisdictions may make the state guidelines more strict by adding requirements. Local jurisdictions are not allowed to make state guidelines more lenient. Some Counties have published updated Guidelines for Farmers Markets:

- **King County** - [Farmers Markets COVID-19 Plan Requirements](Jan. 2021).
  Includes changes to space requirements between vendors, numbers of shoppers allowed, and reporting.
- **Snohomish County** - [Information for Farmers Markets and Vendors during COVID-19 Pandemic]( }
Guidelines for Farmers Markets

Updated on February 12, 2021, the current statewide guidelines are included in a new document that also includes guidelines for other "food establishments" such as restaurants, grocery, hunger relief, and fairs. The key documents are:

- The Governor's COVID19 In Store Retail Guidance [2/1/2021]
- The Governor's COVID19 Miscellaneous Venues Guidance [2/1/2021]
- The Governor's COVID19 Performing Arts Theater Sector Guidance [1/11/2021]
- Overview of COVID-19 Statewide Face Covering Requirements

Be prepared for people who see the market and are concerned that it is operating as “business as usual.” There will be others who resist complying with public health and market policies. Consider an A-board and other communication that tells the community what you are doing to protect them and be in full compliance with all directives and best practices. Keep in mind what message you want the public to see and hear about your farmers market.

Market Operations & COVID-19 Safety Plans

1. Stay informed about what your local health department and other officials are recommending for your particular community/jurisdiction.

2. The DOH Guidance is to "Develop a written plan that is at least as strict as the governor’s requirements and complies with the appropriate safety and health requirements and guidelines set by the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries and the Washington State Department of Health. In addition, a comprehensive COVID-19 exposure control, mitigation, and recovery plan must be developed and adhered to. A site specific COVID-19 monitor shall be designated at each location to monitor the health of individuals and enforce the COVID-19 safety plan. These plans must be retained onsite and made available to regulatory agencies upon request. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in sanctions up to, and including, license suspension." COVID-19 Guidance for Food Workers & Establishments [2/12/2021]. Check with your local health department to find out what kind of plan they require from farmers markets. Local requirements can vary widely.

3. The DOH Guidance is to "Maintain a daily log of all guests that voluntarily provide contact information, including customer names, phone/email, and time/date they were in the facility. Maintain the log for 30 days to help with contact tracing." For more information see the Governor’s Customer Log Memo & Customer Log Template. COVID-19 Guidance for Food Workers & Establishments [2/12/2021]. All you have to do is have a copy of customer log at your information booth in case someone wants to provide this information.
4. The DOH Guidance asks that all employees wash their hands often and thoroughly. Prepared food vendors should follow all the standard food worker rules for food safety. The Reducing Consumables in Food Establishments document provides tips to reduce waste and prevent bare hand contact.

5. Farmers markets should review the DOH Guidance on Worker Health & Safety (pp 5-6) and share guidance with vendors. Key resources include:
   - Daily COVID-19 Screening of Staff and Visitors guidance
   - Employee Health & Decision Strategies
   - COVID-19 Prevention: General Workplace Requirements
   - COVID-19 Workplace Safety and Health Requirements
   - DOH’s Resources for Workplaces and Employers

6. Vendors and staff should not come to the market if they feel sick or have any of the COVID-19 symptoms: fever, dry cough, shortness of breathing. Anyone who appears to be ill upon arrival to the market or becomes sick during the day should be sent home immediately. Likewise, vendors should not come to the market if they feel they are at risk in any way. Consider waiving vendor cancellation fees to help with compliance.

7. Plan for clear and frequent communications with vendors so they know about any market schedule, operational, and other changes. Do not rely on social media alone; find time to call and email so you are sure to reach them. Likewise, continue to provide clear and frequent communications with shoppers and local market community.

   The DOH recommends using "social media, email, or other methods to share updates on operating standards and expectations at the market. For example, encourage pre-ordering and “single shoppers” (one member of a family shops the market while others stay home) if possible."

8. The DOH also recommends that farmers markets "keep a log with notes on what works well and what needs to change before the next market event (such as providing more handwashing sinks)."

**Face Masks**

Regrettably, face masks have become a source of controversy at farmers markets. Farmers markets and vendors "have the right to refuse service and are encouraged to not serve customers or visitors who aren’t wearing face coverings. Businesses can offer accommodations such as curbside pick-up or delivery."

DOH guidance is that everyone "must wear a face covering anytime they are not actively eating or drinking."
Resources that might help:
- Overview of COVID-19 Statewide Face Covering Requirements
- Which Mask for Which Task?
- Common questions and answers regarding worker mask requirements
- Mobile-friendly eTool Selection Guide for Face Coverings, Masks and Respirators
- Also see Masks4All a nonprofit dedicated to mask education

Market Layout & Physical Distancing

1. The key is to design the farmer market layout to prevent shoppers/visitors from gathering in groups.
   - Outdoor farmers markets must ensure 6-feet of physical distancing is maintained between customers/households while they are in the market.
   - Indoor farmers markets must limit indoor capacity to 25% (not including employees) in both Phases 1 and 2.

2. The DOH has made the physical distancing requirements between vendors more flexible.
   - "Vendor booths must be placed a minimum of 6-feet away from adjacent booths, or there must be a physical barrier or wall separating booths or tables. Barriers should be at least 6 feet in height and must have two open sides/panels to allow air flow."
   - For indoor farmers markets: "Vendor booths must be placed a minimum of 6-feet away from adjacent booths. Keep the empty spaces unoccupied."
   - "Ensure 6-feet of separation is maintained between customers and vendors except for unavoidable, short-term exposures such as when taking orders, collecting payments and/or exchanging goods."

3. "Monitor the flow of customers to eliminate bottlenecks and reduce crowding. Create a plan for how to respond when people aren’t in compliance with physical distancing measures and ask vendors to help ensure plans are followed."

4. DOH also recommends, when possible,
   - Provide shopping hours for people at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness and encourage customers to shop at less popular times to avoid congestion";
   - Prohibit pets (except for service animals) to help minimize congestion."

Sampling

DOH's guidance during Phases 1 and 2 is to "discontinue product sampling and demonstration stations, except for single portions offered in response to a consumer’s request. Provide areas for customers to try samples while maintaining 6 feet of distance."

Note: We are checking with WSLCB to confirm their 2021 guidance regarding sampling.
Live Entertainment

The DOH Guidelines state that "live entertainment (such as music or comedy performances) must follow the Governor’s requirements for theater and performing arts. The key is Section A, Phase 2, Outdoor, and "a minimum of 20 feet of physical distancing is required between artists/performers and the audience." Any stage equipment must also be cleaned and sanitized between acts.

Market Signage

1. Visitors should self-screen for symptoms before they enter your farmers market. Post signs at to inform customers to:
   • Stay home if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
   • Use cloth face coverings when visiting the establishment.
   • Practice proper physical distancing while in the establishment.

2. Provide signs or spacing markers to promote 6-feet of distance between visitors.

3. You can use the downloadable DOH Signage for farmers markets and find more COVID-19 specific posters and materials here:
   • Washington State Coronavirus Response Partner Toolkit
   • King County Signs to Print and Post
   • CDC’s COVID-19 Print Resources

Booth & Display Guidance

1. Maintain physical distancing between shoppers and vendors. This may be achieved by adding an extra table in front of the cash box; setting up a rope line, or other barriers.

2. Minimize or eliminate shoppers' ability to touch product they are not buying.

3. All displays should be made of materials that are able to be sanitized frequently throughout the market. Disinfect check-out counters and payment touchpads at least every hour.

4. Money has not been linked to the spread of coronavirus, but it is still important to reduce direct hand contact with shoppers.
   • When possible, allow mobile, credit card, or other cash-free payment options.
   • Encourage customers to pre-order/pre-pay when possible.
   • Provide handwashing or hand gel for employees handling payment.
   • When handling cash, tokens, checks, or change, designate a money handler separate from the worker handling products. Ask for exact change to help limit additional handling. You can also collect payment in a container rather than directly into hands.
5. To disinfect wooden tokens, consider the following:
   • “Quarantine” tokens by holding in a container until the next week. Tokens held should not need additional disinfection for COVID-19.
   • Use a cloth wetted with disinfectant to clean wooden tokens or laminated paper, then air dry. Wash hands after disinfecting objects.
   • See Tips for Sanitizing Tokens from MIFMA.

6. Consider adding signage about how you’re doing, how much you appreciate customers, and what you need them to do - and not do - in your booth.

**General Cleaning, Sanitation & Disinfecting**

Cleaning is a necessary first step for sanitizing and disinfecting chemicals to work effectively. Use soap and water to clean food and non-food contact surfaces. Then do a thorough sanitation of all market equipment prior to market.

- The market information booth and all vendor booths should clean and disinfect all “high-touch” surfaces such as tabletops, check-out areas, cash registers, payment touchpads, restroom fixtures and handwashing sinks, and trash cans frequently.
- Minimize use of smartphones while at the market and clean market devices.
- Consider removing decorative objects, papers, and other unneeded materials from counters. Unobstructed counter surfaces make it easier to clean and disinfect.
- Manage waste safely and dispose in a secure trash container.

**Effective Disinfectants.** Use an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered product that cleans (removes germs) and disinfects (kills germs). Always follow the instructions on the labels of cleaning products and disinfectants.

To make a bleach solution, mix 1 tablespoon of bleach to 1 quart (4 cups) of water. For a larger supply, add ¼ cup of bleach to 1 gallon (16 cups) of water. Use the solution within 20 minutes. Use test strips to test chlorine solution (100 ppm). Other EPA-approved disinfectants may be used if they are effective against Coronavirus. Consumer may contact the “1-800” number on product label for its effectiveness against “COVID-19”.

Please see the excellent NC State Extension Fact Sheets on COVID-19 Preventative Measures for more information:
- What is the Difference between Cleaning, Sanitizing, Disinfecting and Sterilizing?
- Cleaning and Disinfection

**Ensure all market staff and visitors have the means to clean their hands.** Install temporary, portable handwashing stations or alcohol-based hand antiseptic dispensers for market staff, volunteers, and visitors:
- Handwashing stations must have soap; running, potable warm water; and single-use towels.
- Antiseptic hand rubs must have at least 60% ethyl alcohol or 70% isopropyl alcohol.
If You Suspect COVID-19

"Contact your local health department within 24 hours if you suspect COVID-19 is spreading in your market or if you are aware of 2 or more people who developed confirmed or suspected COVID-19 within a 14-day period. Use the DOH Employee Health & Decision Strategies guidance and DOH Checklist for Businesses with Suspected or Confirmed Cases of COVID-19 to determine next steps. You should work with local health to confirm the number of probable and confirmed cases; determine close contacts; ensure control measures are in place; and verify that your business is following appropriate industry-specific requirements to prevent further workplace transmission. You may be asked to provide a list of all potentially exposed employees, vendors, and customers. In addition, temporary closure of your market may be required such as when inadequate control measures are in place or workplace transmission is high."

COVID-19 Guidance for Food Workers & Establishments [2/12/2021]

Farmers Market Safe-Operating Plans

Our primary concern is the health and safety of our farmers and producers, market shoppers, market staff, and the host community. Farmers markets take serious all safety precautions, including: revising market operations; reducing the number of vendors and changing the market layout; expecting shoppers and vendors to abide by public health directives and new market rules; and making a cultural shift from being highly social to proactively limiting time at the market and maintaining physical distances.

Sample plans from 2020:
Olympia Farmers Market COVID-19 Response
Example of Farmers Market Plan of Operations_COVID-19
California Alliance COVID19 Webinar April 13, 2020 featuring photos and tips for safe operating practices from the North Coast Growers' Association, CUESA, SEE-LA, and San Diego Markets.

Additional Department of Health Guidance (available in various languages):

- Food Worker and Establishment Guidance on COVID-19, English, Spanish.
- Dining Area Closures: Guidance for Food Establishments. English
- Stigma Reduction. English
- WA L&I COVID-19 Resources