COVID-19 PREVENTATIVE MEASURES
PREPARING AND PACKING FOR MASS FOOD DISTRIBUTION

There are no documented cases of COVID-19 being contracted from food or food packaging, but there have been several instances at places where food is served or sold due to person-to-person transmission, especially without face coverings. However, it is always important to follow good hygiene practices when handling or preparing food to prevent foodborne illnesses. If you are distributing food to large groups of people consider food safety, physical distance, health and hygiene as well as cleaning and disinfecting best practices.

PREPARING FOOD FOR OTHERS

- As always, follow good hygiene and food safety practices when preparing food:
  - Purchase food from reputable sources
  - Cook food thoroughly by checking food temperatures with a calibrated digital thermometer
  - Measure at the thickest spot and stir liquid-based foods before checking temperature
  - Cool perishable foods quickly from 135ºF to 41ºF by dividing food in smaller portions or shallow containers, placing in an ice water bath or stirring food frequently to cool faster
  - Maintain safe holding temperatures
  - Use good personal hygiene and wash hands frequently
  - Clean and sanitize dishes, tools and surfaces

HANDLING ALLERGENS

- Ask if people have known food allergies before packaging food for individuals and keep allergy-safe separate from other meals
- Have different serving utensils for each dish when portioning food to prevent cross-contact
- Label foods containing major allergens: milk, eggs, tree nuts, shellfish/mollusks, fish, soy, peanuts and wheat

TIP: Assign volunteers preparing, packing or distributing food in groups so they always work together to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

PACKING FOOD

- No clusters of illnesses linked to food consumption or handling have been observed anywhere in the world, but epidemiologists and food safety professionals continue to look for links
  - However, to further minimize risk, when repackaging previously cooked food made from a third party such as pizza slices, wash your hands and/or use hand sanitizer after handling the packaging
- Mark food when food the time and date it was prepared
- Properly cover the food to prevent cross-contamination

HOLDING FOOD

135ºF
57°C

41ºF
5°C
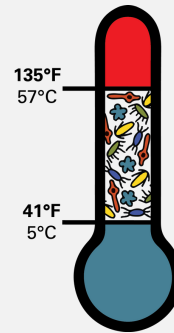
- Harmful bacteria grow fastest between 41ºF and 135ºF so it is important to minimize the time food is left in this range
- Hold hot foods at 135ºF or above by using chafing dishes, warming trays or slow cookers
- Hold cold foods at 41ºF or lower by placing food containers in larger containers filled with ice
- Perishable foods, such as those containing animal products, cooked vegetables and grains can remain without temperature control for up to 4 hours if:
  - Organization has an established procedure for using Time as a Public Health Control
  - Foods must be marked with start time
  - Starting temperature must be at or above 135°F or at or below 41°F
  - They will not be reheated or re-cooled
- All perishable food should be tossed or composted after four hours at room temperature