

Department of Family and Consumer Sciences

GETTING FOOD DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, people are changing the way that they do everyday activities. It is no surprise that the pandemic is changing the way people get food as well. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends families keep two weeks of food on hand to be prepared. This resource provides information and tips to help you safely get food from several sources.

Grocery Stores

You might notice that some items are out of stock or in low supply in your local grocery store. It is important to know that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reports that there is not a nationwide shortage of food due to the pandemic.

Use these tips as you shop for food at your local grocery store:

- Consider using curbside pickup or grocery delivery if this service is available in your area. Many stores have changed their hours during the pandemic. Research your local food stores to learn their current hours of service.
- Many stores have special hours for older adults and other vulnerable populations. If you are an older adult or member of a vulnerable population, consider shopping during these designated times.
- Reduce stress and save time in the store by making a list before you go shopping.
- Look for recipes you want to use in the upcoming weeks. Check your pantry first to see what items you already have. Choose recipes based on what you have on hand as much as possible. Record all the items you need from the grocery store. Organize your list according to sections of the grocery store to save time.
- Plan to shop for perishable items like fresh produce, meats, dairy products and eggs at the end of your shopping trip.



Getting Food During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- While shopping, be sure to keep an eye on your spending and how that spending fits in your overall household food budget.
- Use disinfectant wipes on shopping carts and grocery baskets.
- Be sure to maintain a safe social distance (6 to 8 feet) while shopping and waiting in line.
- Keep in mind you might have to be flexible with your grocery list, depending on availability of certain items in your local food store. Also remember that you can make ingredient substitutions in many recipes.
- Remember to wash your hands after grocery shopping.
- If grocery delivery services are unavailable and you are unable or afraid to visit the store yourself, ask neighbors or friends if they could shop for you.
- AARP Mutual Aid Groups are one way to connect with people. Mutual Aid Groups provide a variety of opportunities, which may include opportunities for social connection or assistance with daily tasks, like grocery shopping.
 - Learn about, join or start a Mutual Aid Groups in your community:
aarpmutualaid.org/?fbclid=IwAR0oG5552QFfFmm0zbwahULXnFtEflsC3DOmtDdIXwkmEHp0x3rHpCMF2E

A word about hoarding:

During times of crisis and uncertainty, it is easy for our emotions to take control of our shopping decisions. In some cases, these emotional reactions can lead to the hoarding of certain items. Empty and bare grocery store shelves further feed and reinforce our desire to buy more than we can actually need.

In order to ensure plenty of items are available to others in your community, it is important to purchase only what you and your family actually need. By avoiding hoarding behavior, you will not overburden the supply chain of goods, thus enabling others in your community to meet their household needs. Remember, we are all in this together.

Restaurants

At this time the FDA, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and CDC report that there is no evidence indicating COVID-19 is spread through food or food packages. Although it is possible that the virus could be spread if a person touches a surface that has the virus on it, then touches their mouth, nose or eyes, but it is not the main way the virus spreads. The virus is mainly spread from person to person. Many restaurants are offering curbside pickup and delivery options, which minimize or eliminate person-to-person contact.

Practice these tips when you get food from a restaurant:

- Avoid eating inside restaurants, bars and food courts, which has already been banned or limited in some cities across the state.
- Use the drive-thru, pickup or delivery options to get food from restaurants.

- Be sure to tip even when using pickup or delivery options. Individuals working in the service industry rely on tips as a critical part of their wages.
- Reduce your risk by washing your hands after touching food packages that you get from restaurants and cleaning and sanitizing surfaces or utensils that contact food packages.

Food Assistance Programs

There are several food assistance programs that are available to help individuals and families get enough food.

- Meals for Children — While schools are closed, many school districts are providing free meals for children and teens.
 - To find meal sites in your area, text “FOOD” to 877-87 or visit the School Meal Finder website: schoolmealfinder.hoonuit.com/?filter_state=tn
 - Many local school districts are still providing meals to students while schools are closed. To find out if your district is serving meals, contact your local department of education, email your child’s teacher, or visit the school’s website.
- Home Delivered Meals are a source of healthy meals for older adults.
 - Use this website to learn about the Home Delivered Meals services currently offered in your area: tn.gov/aging/our-programs/nutrition-services/home-delivered-meals.html
- SNAP — SNAP benefits help qualifying households buy enough food for themselves and their families.
 - During the pandemic, people are encouraged to sign up for SNAP benefits online: faonlineapp.dhs.tn.gov
- WIC — Provides supplemental foods for qualifying pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women and infants and children up to age 5.
 - To learn more about WIC visit this website: tn.gov/content/tn/health/health-program-areas/fhw/wic/redirect-wic/wic-clinics.html

Food Pantries

Food pantries are a source of foods to help individuals and families get enough food. Food pantries may be providing services like emergency food boxes during the pandemic. To locate a food pantry and learn about services available in your area, visit the following websites:

- foodpantries.org
- East Tennessee:
 - netfoodbank.org/find-a-food-pantry
 - secondharvesttn.org/find-a-food-pantry
 - chattfoodbank.org/hungry
- Middle Tennessee: secondharvestmidtn.org/get-help
- West Tennessee: midsouthfoodbank.org/find-assistance

In addition, you may be able to locate local food pantries through an internet search. It is important to call before you visit any food pantry you may find online. Calling ahead will help you determine if the pantry is open, its hours and any qualifications for using the food pantry's services.

References

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