

Recommendations to minimize the spread of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Farmer's Markets May 1, 2020

NOTE: The following information is based on the most recent information from our state and federal public health partners. As more information becomes available, we will update this announcement.

Required:

Farmer's Markets must have sanitary operating conditions and follow strict physical distancing of 6 feet to open.

The following statement is from the "State of Montana Coronavirus Phase One Reopening Frequently Asked Questions" document dated April 28, 2020. "Farmers Markets may re-open only if they can follow strict social distancing and sanitation guidance. That should include clear markings for customers, and it is the responsibility of organizers to ensure that all vendors and customers are adhering to safe and sanitary operating conditions. Please note that additional restrictions may be placed on Farmers Markets by city and county health officials. Farmers Markets are encouraged to explore partnerships for food and produce vendors with local retailers for pickup or delivery services in lieu of regular gatherings if social distancing guidelines cannot be followed."



Key Criteria for Operation:

Before opening, Farmer's Market managers should contact their local sanitarian to determine if and how the following can be achieved:

1. **Preventing food and touch contamination** by market staff/volunteers, vendors, and customers
2. **Physical Distancing**—providing ways to maintain a physical distance of at least 6 feet between people.
3. **Communication**—clear messaging on market operations to market staff/volunteers, vendors, and customers

1. **Preventing Contamination**

Market Managers should:

- Ensure frequently touched surfaces are cleaned and sanitized as often as possible
- Reiterate to market staff/volunteers, vendors, and customers that if anyone shows any signs of illness, they must **not** attend the market, or prepare or handle food at food establishments or commissary kitchens. If employees are present, the employer must conduct a temperature check and/or symptom screening.
- Advise those attending the market in any capacity — customer, vendor, worker, volunteer — to wash their hands upon arrival and upon returning home.

- Set-up non-hand activated, temporary hand-washing stations, in addition to those at the vendor booths, throughout the market. If soap and water are not readily available, **use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol**. Signage should remind customers to wash or sanitize their hands frequently.
- Ensure that all required vendor booths have handwashing stations, per permitting and licensing.
- Increase the frequency with which staff/volunteers disinfect surfaces/objects throughout the market.
- Increase cleaning and sanitizing frequency of toileting room and other high contact areas such as payment devices.
- Eliminate eating areas and direct customers to take prepared foods home to avoid crowds.



Vendors should:

- If showing any signs of illness, must **not** attend the market or prepare or handle food at food establishments or commissary kitchens. If employees are present, the employer must conduct a temperature check and/or symptom screening.
- Wash their hands before arriving, upon leaving, and all other times handwashing is required per food handling and preparation regulations.
- Ensure that each food booth required by permit or license to have a hand-wash station, has one.
- Vendors required by permit or license to wear gloves, must wear disposable gloves to avoid contamination and/or touching their faces, and change disposable gloves whenever changing tasks as required by food handling and preparation regulations.
 - For example: Do not handle money and then handle products using the same gloves.
 - Alternately: Assign one person to handle money and another person to handle products.
- Increase the frequency of disinfection of surfaces/objects in their booth, with EPA-approved disinfectants. Contact your local sanitarian with questions.
- Ensure they only have one customer, or customers occupying the same household, at a time at their booth, and ensure that customers are maintaining 6 ft. distancing.
- Prevent customers from touching products, by bagging for them, not offering samples, consider pre-packaging of prepared foods, or if they bring their own reusable bag, set their order aside to bag themselves.
- Round prices to the nearest dollar to avoid the need for coins in making change.
- Encourage credit-card transactions whenever possible.
- Split duties for payment and bagging between two different people.
- All prepared food should be packaged for off-site consumption in order to ensure customers understand they must leave the market before consuming.
- Consider shielding protection between customer and vendor
- Consider signage for customers
 - Maintain 6 feet distance between people
 - One-way directional foot traffic between vendor booths



Customers should:

- If showing any signs of illness, **not** attend the market.
- Wash their hands before arriving and upon leaving.
- Only bring members from the same household needed to make a purchase.
- Remain at least 6 ft apart from others, including staff/volunteers, vendors, and customers in line. Members of the same household may stand together.
- Only one customer, or customers from the same household, at a time at each vendor booth.
- Wash produce at home before consumption.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer after contact with surfaces such as tables or cash.

2. Physical Distancing

Market managers are required to follow strict physical distancing guidance—this requires that all attendees leave at least 6 ft between themselves at all times in the market.

Market managers should:

- Promote physical distancing by enforcing spacing between vendor booths to create at least 6 ft physical distance between vendors.
- Discontinue any activities that encourage gathering, such as kids' corners or musical performances.
- Eliminate, or cordon off, any seating and eating areas.
- Physically redesign to limit social contact and promote 6 feet distancing.
- Communicate changes with staff/volunteers, vendors, and customers, and provide staff/volunteers to educate and direct customers.



Additional logistics can encourage physical distancing and prevent community spread.

- Have vendors use extra tables or barriers to create 6-ft space between vendor and customer.
- Limit traffic to one customer, or customers from the same household, per vendor booth at a time.
- Use cones, flagging, chalk lines, signage, market volunteers, etc. to mark and maintain 6ft. distances in the market.
- Encourage customers to prepare advance shopping lists to reduce shopping times.
- Have customers remain in their vehicles if lines begin to form.
- Require that customers leave after they have completed their purchases.
- Limit the number of customers at any given time as necessary to reduce outdoor/indoor crowding and lines to meet physical distancing guidance.
- Offer payment chits or plastic or metal chips, purchased from market staff/volunteers before entering the market, and used to pay vendors for food instead of using cash. Vendors redeem for account credit, and market staff/volunteers discard chits or disinfect chips.

Physical Redesign Considerations

- Relocating the market to a larger space to allow adequate separation
- Keeping all booths along one side of street to avoid crowding and maximize flow
- One entrance and one exit with people flowing only one way through the market.
- Controlled number of people admitted at one time to limit crowding.

- Create a layout so that customers may shop from their cars, e.g. vendors set-up on sidewalk facing a drive, and cars travel past the booths for service.

3. Communication

Maintaining communication with staff/volunteers, vendors, and customers is the best way to successfully implement any new procedures or policies.

- Post signs asking customers to practice physical distancing and **not** touch products.
- Use print, radio, broadcast, and social media and newsletters to promote vendors, their products and updated policies.
- Recommend that all market attendees follow [CDC recommendations](#) on minimizing the community spread of COVID-19.

Alternative Marketplaces:

There is a significant chance that farmer’s markets as they have been traditionally set up could be postponed or potentially cancelled. Now is the time to consider alternatives for selling products.

Consider:

- A drive-thru market — in which customers pick up orders from their vehicles, which limits both contact with others and their time at the market.
- Setting-up vendors, market staff, volunteer groups, or some or all of these to deliver food to waiting cars, or to people’s homes.
- Set-up deliveries by vendor or third-party delivery companies such as Uber Eats or Door Dash.

Here is how such a market could work:

- The market manager creates a menu tab on the farmers’ market website.
- Customers view products and place orders via Google Forms (or other online form).
- Pickup times are designated for customers, who stay in their vehicles during pickup.
- Staff/volunteers and vendors pass out orders to customers while following all [CDC handwashing guidelines](#).
- Staff/volunteers and vendors deliver to customers’ homes.
- Vendors who are exempt or who have state food licenses could sell through farmer’s e-market sites throughout the week, and TFS operators would be limited to sales on market days only.
- Vendors can also implement online ordering through their sites — using the farmers’ market as a pickup location for pre-packaged products.



If you have questions regarding COVID-19 and farmer’s markets, reach out to your local sanitarian (contact information available on www.fcsc.mt.gov) or Food and Consumer Safety at 444-2837.

If you have general questions about COVID-19, please visit the following site: <https://covid19.mt.gov/>.

Resources:

[CDC handwashing guidelines](#) <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>

[CDC recommendations](#) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>