



CORONAVIRUS
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Ensuring Food Security During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Key messages:

- COVID-19 can greatly impact a city's food security.
- Certain groups, including those with limited income, people already in poor health, city residents with limited mobility, and the elderly are at greatest risk.
- Fortunately, city leaders can implement measures to prevent, alleviate and respond to many potential negative consequences on food security.

This guide will help you to:

- Provide a thorough introduction to relevant stakeholders about the key ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic may cause severe hunger and nutrition problems in your city.
- Understand what your city can do to reduce potential food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Who will implement food security measures?

- The mayor and members of the municipal leadership team, emergency response team, disaster management team, and communications support team.

How to detect early signs that COVID-19 is affecting your city's food security

Efforts to control the COVID-19 pandemic are already affecting workforces, transit systems and supply chains around the world. The global impacts of the virus may result in your city experiencing a food crisis even before you've confirmed many cases in your municipality. Early signs of disruption include struggling import or export industries, limitations in local food supplies, hoarding, price increases and **disruption of economic activities**.

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Populations most vulnerable to food insecurity

Some people and communities are more vulnerable than others when it comes to the impact of food insecurity. Most at-risk are **those who are already struggling with hunger, health and poverty**. Particularly at-risk groups include:

- People with limited or irregular income, including those who cannot build up emergency reserves of food or other resources
- People employed in occupations that may be severely impacted by measures put in place to reduce the number of cases (e.g. restaurants, retail, informal employment and tourism)
- People in poor health including those with chronic diseases
- City residents with limited social networks
- Slum dwellers, the homeless or internally displaced
- The elderly
- Those with little or no transportation

How your city can protect food security

- While food security is often handled at the national level, city leadership should anticipate system-wide delays and bottlenecks. It is therefore important to start planning for your city as soon as possible, in the event that you will have to become food self-sufficient for a period of time. In general, this means prioritizing:
- Food availability: Partnering with national government and the private sector to **secure essential food stocks of 6-12 weeks**
- Food access: Ensuring the population, especially at-risk groups listed above, can obtain the food they need throughout the pandemic and during periods of quarantine and physical isolation
- Food utilization: Ensuring the population understands the importance of nutrition and safe food and water storage
- Food prices: Ensuring that food prices do not increase significantly over the course of the response to the local COVID-19 epidemic, and that food prices are reduced for the most vulnerable.

TABLE 1: POTENTIAL FOOD SECURITY ISSUES AND ACTIONS

Conditions affecting food availability, access of utilization	Actions to strengthen food availability	Timing
Food shortages resulting from transport restrictions or market disruptions	Public education about the need to prepare for food shortages at the household level	Before, early pandemic
Limited production due to closed markets or sick employees	Increase household and community food production through seed distribution and technical assistance to local farmers	Before, early and after pandemic



Conditions affecting food availability, access of utilization	Actions to strengthen food availability	Timing
Acquired food spoils	Inventory public and private storage facilities	Before pandemic
Food is committed for sale outside the city	Restrict the export of locally produced food	During pandemic
Residents may be unable to purchase food due to illness or job loss	Organize food voucher programs and set controlled pricing on high-demand items	Before, early, during and after pandemic
People who live alone may be too ill to go to a market	Scale up food delivery systems	During pandemic
Food hoarding by those with excess means	Campaigns about the consequences of hoarding on at-risk populations; purchase limitations on high-demand products	Before, early and during pandemic
Drastic increase in food prices	Implement wholesale and retail price controls on essential food commodities	During pandemic
Lack of knowledge about nutrition or proper child feeding practices	Household education programs	Before, early, during and after pandemic
Power or service outages causing people to consume unsafe food or water	Implement contingency plan to maintain essential city services; distribute water storage containers	Early, during pandemic

Table 1: Adapted from USAID/PAHO

Food security is a multisectoral challenge

Assuring food security during the COVID-19 pandemic requires whole-of-government response with strong collaboration with the private sector. Key partners will include:

- Agriculture sector
- Humanitarian and development organizations
- National emergency management agencies
- Public works and water agencies
- Educators and community leaders
- Food wholesalers and retailers
- Community-based organizations
- Healthcare sector



TABLE 2: COORDINATING ACROSS SECTORS

Sector	Potential Events and Consequences	Preparedness	Responses
Health and Medical	Large number of sick people leading to a huge demand on clinic and hospital services	Develop city health sector plans, prioritize care and stockpile medical supplies	Implement measures to limit the virus spread; encourage and support home-based healthcare when appropriate
Family Welfare and Food Security	Job loss or decreased access to regularly utilized services	Identify households most at risk; increase community food stockpiles	Establish small decentralized distribution centers and prioritize food transfers
Commerce and Trade	Restrictions on movement of people, good or services leads to negative economic impacts on households or businesses	Assess resources and create business continuity plans	Implement social distancing and allocate scarce resources. Implement economic and regulatory controls
Government and Public Services	Strain on public services leads to conflicts over resources	Develop contingency plans, information and communication systems	Implement crisis communication as needed

Table 2: Adapted from USAID/PAHO

SOURCE(S)

This document is adapted for use by the Partnership for Healthy Cities program from [USAID & PAHO, Leadership During a Pandemic: What Your Municipality Can Do, Tool 7: Household Food Security Preparedness.](#)