



Best Food Safety Practices for Hunger Relief Organizations: Volunteer Health, Hygiene, and Training

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Volunteers play a crucial role in hunger relief organizations. They assist with receiving orders, handling the foods, storing, and distributing the foods. Since volunteers might be involved in direct food contact, they are a key aspect of ensuring food safety practices in these organizations (De Boeck et al. 2017; Guinee 2023; Harvey 2019; Landers 2020; Makhunga et al. 2018).

Ensuring volunteer health and hygiene can reduce food safety risks in hunger relief organizations. This is because human can be a source of food safety hazards.

Some common examples of improper health and hygiene practices observed among volunteers in hunger relief organizations include:

- Improper handwashing
- Improper use of chemical sanitizers on food contact surface
- Wearing dirty or torn clothing while working with food
- Touching face, hair, or other parts of the body while handling food
- Sneezing or coughing directly to exposed food
- Eating and drinking while working with food
- Failing to cover open wounds or cuts with bandages and gloves

This fact sheet provides recommended (not required) practices for hunger relief organizations on personal health and hygiene.

Recommended Practices for Volunteer Health

Volunteers should report to their supervisors if they are diagnosed with foodborne illness or have any of the following symptoms:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Jaundice (Yellowing of skins and eyes)
- Sore throat with a fever

Supervisors should instruct sick volunteers to stay home.



Figure 1. A man who appears to be ill ([CDC Public Health Image Library 2016](#))

Recommended Practices for Volunteer Hygiene

Hand Hygiene

Handwashing Facilities

Handwashing sinks should only be used for handwashing.

You should NOT do the following:

- Wash your hands in three-compartment dish sink
- Dump dirty water into the handwashing sink
- Wash foods in the handwashing sink
- Wash utensils and tools in the handwashing sink
- Stack food, equipment, or supplies in or in front of handwashing sinks.

Supervisors should make sure that the handwashing facilities are stocked. A stocked handwashing facility should have:

- Hot and cold running water
- Soap
- Single-use paper towels or hand dryer
- Garbage container
- Handwashing signage (Figure 2)

Volunteers should let supervisors know if these items are not stocked.

How to Wash Hands?

Volunteer should properly wash their hands. Proper handwashing steps include:

- Wet the hands with warm running water
- Apply enough soaps to build up a good lather
- Scrub the hands and arms rigorously for at least 20 seconds
 - Don't forget to clean fingertips, fingernails, and between the fingers
- Rinse the hands thoroughly under warm running water
- Dry the hands with single-used paper towel or hand dryer.
 - NEVER use apron or any part of clothing to dry the hands
- Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet and to open the restroom door once the hands are cleaned

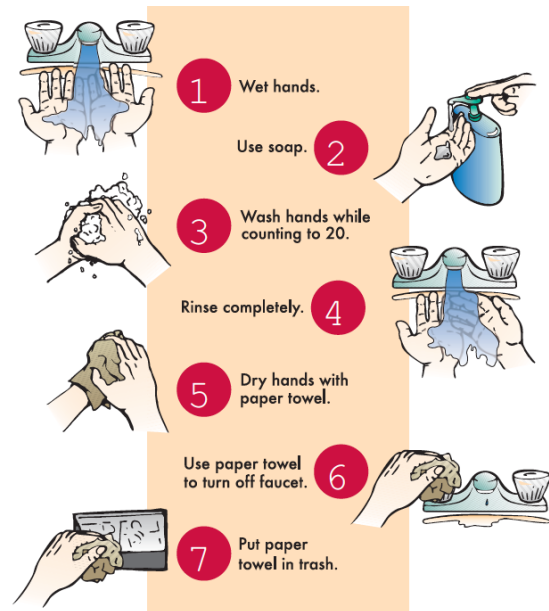


Figure 2. A simple poster showing the proper way to wash hands (Boyer 2020)

When to Wash Hands?

Washing hands properly is critical, and once they are cleaned it is easy to contaminate them again. Volunteers should know when to wash hands. Handwashing should be required for volunteers:

- Before starting to work
- Before putting on gloves at the start of a new task
- After using the restrooms
- After touching face, hair, body
- After touching apron, clothing
- Before and after touching raw meat, poultry, or seafood
- After sneezing or coughing
- After taking out garbage
- After eating, drinking, chewing gum
- After using tobacco products
- After using chemicals that can make food unsafe (sanitizers, pesticides, etc.)
- After leaving and returning the food-handling area (e.g. to pick up a phone call)

What about Hand Sanitizers?

Hand sanitizers are NOT a substitute for handwashing and should be used AFTER handwashing. Make sure to let hands dry before touching anything or before putting on gloves. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions when using hand sanitizers. Figure 3 shows a guide of using hand sanitizers from CDC.



Figure 3. A guide of using hand sanitizer in the right way (CDC 2022)

Using Gloves for Food Handling

If a volunteer is involved in food handling practices, make sure they have access to single use food-handling gloves. To use gloves correctly:

- Make sure to use the proper size of gloves
- NEVER blow into the gloves
- NEVER roll the gloves to make them easier to put on
- NEVER wash and reuse the gloves

Gloves should be changed in the following cases:

- Before beginning a different task
- As soon as they become dirty or torn
- Before and after handling any known food allergen
- Before handling ready-to-eat food
- After handling raw meat, seafood, and poultry
- After being interrupted during a task, like picking up a phone call

Other Hand Hygiene Practices

- Keep the fingernails short and clean
- Avoid wearing false nails or nail polish
- Cover all open wounds with bandages and wear gloves

Clothing

Dirty hair, skin, and clothing may carry pathogens — the bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites that can cause foodborne illness. Volunteers in hunger relief organizations should:

- Wear clean clothes when working with food
- Remove and throw away disposable aprons when leaving clean rooms or food handling areas
- Store personal belongings (coats, backpacks, purses) away from food
- Wear clean hat or hair net when repackaging food, working in a clean room, and working in areas of utensil and equipment cleaning
- People with beards and mustaches should wear beard restraint
- Remove all jewelries, watches, false fingernails, etc. before starting the work (except for plain band rings)

Eating, Drinking, Chewing Gum, and Using Tobacco Products

Eating, drinking, chewing gum, and using tobacco products can spread pathogens from your mouth to the food through your hands and equipment. These behaviors can also introduce physical hazards into the foods, such as plastic wrap, aluminum foil, and cigarette butts.

Hunger relief organizations should have designated areas for eating, drinking, chewing gum, and using tobacco products.

- **ONLY** do these things in the designated areas
- **NEVER** do these things in food handling or storage areas

Recommended Practices for Volunteer Training

- Stress the importance of personal health and hygiene in hunger relief organizations
- Focus on the value that keeping food safe is also a part of “doing the good” for the community in hunger relief organizations

- Hunger relief organizations can develop basic health and hygiene training for new volunteers based on the existing resources (e.g. ServSafe Food Handler Guide for Food Banking) and in partnership with Virginia Cooperative Extension educators
- Hunger relief organizations can keep a record of when volunteers are first trained
- Hunger relief organizations can plan health and hygiene refreshers on a regular basis for returning volunteers

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Additional Resources

Best Food Safety Practices for Hunger Relief Organizations When Accepting, Sorting, and Storing Donated Foods. FST-456NP. Available at: https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/FST/fst-456/fst-456.html

Best Food Safety Practices for Hunger Relief Organizations When Distributing Foods. FST-457NP. Available at: https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/FST/fst-457/fst-457.html.

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