



Food Distribution Guidelines

1 Introduction

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago (GoRTT) recognises that Faith-Based Organisations (FBO) are significant in any development process, and has distinct capabilities as it relates to service delivery in their communities that lead to multiple positive outcomes. Two key functions of FBOs are their close connections with residents built on shared values and trust at the community level, and their ability to mobilise efforts that will facilitate development.

In this regard, the FBO community is integral to the national COVID-19 pandemic response. One of the efforts the GoRTT has implemented is an emergency humanitarian effort to provide food and other critical supplies to persons who are vulnerable and likely to fall into poverty due to reduced and/ or loss of income.

The main objectives of this document are to provide guidelines that will ensure that the processes and items used for the distribution of hampers, volunteers and beneficiaries are safe, healthy and to ensure that all procedures of food distributors are in line with international standards which mitigate the spread of the COVID-19.

These guidelines have been adapted from the Centre of Disease Control's guidelines for food distribution as well as the World Food Programme's recommendations for food distribution amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

2 Grant Purpose

As explained in the Agreement, the Grant shall only be used for purchasing of goods for the preparation and distribution of hampers and food support to citizens and permanent residents in need of emergency food supplies. **Table I** provides a sample what should be included in the hamper.

Table 1: Sample Hamper

Item	Packaging	QTY
Rice	2kg	1
All Purpose Flour	2kg	1
Macaroni	400g	2
Powdered Milk	2kg	1
Milo	400g	1
Lentil Peas	400g	1

Item	Packaging	QTY
Spilt Peas (Yellow)	400g	1
Oats	400g	1
Brown Sugar	900g	1
Salt	400g	1
Baking Powder	225g	1
Butter	445g	1
Cooking Oil	1.5L	1
Canned Tuna	142g	2
Canned Mackerel	425g	2
Vienna Sausages	141g	4
Toilet Paper	12pack	1
Toothpaste	6oz	1
Beauty Soap	3CT	1
Powdered Detergent	840g	1
Bleach	3800ml	1

3 Distribution Process Guidelines

Considering the threats related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the following guidelines should be considered during distribution periods:

1. Consider disallowing volunteers at high risk for coronavirus to duties that do not involve close contact with the public. People at high risk include people who are over age sixty (60), have underlying health conditions, or pregnant.
2. Organize and clearly mark the following allocated spaces at the distribution site:
 - Reception point, (identity) verification point, collection point and exit to channel off traffic and allow for personal space of at least one meter between each beneficiary.
 - Set up hand washing area with adequate supply of hand washing solution (0.05% bleach solution) and paper towels.
 - Establish sheltered/covered area for beneficiaries that do not receive clearance at the body temperature checkpoint (if possible)
 - The distribution area should be spacious enough to allow beneficiaries to sit/stand at least 6 feet apart from each other.
 - Ensure that there are clearly marked entrance and exit points in the distribution area.¹

¹ World Food Organisation.2020. Recommendations For Adjusting Food Distribution Standard Operating Procedures In The Context Of The Covid-19 Outbreak Available from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20200319_covid_sop_food_assistance.pdf

TIPS:

- Appoint a person who will ensure that people standing in any lines or meeting in rooms stay six (6) feet apart, inside and outside.
 - In areas of high-volume traffic, utilize spacing tools for checkpoints and lines. For example, put tape on the floor to keep people adequately spaced.
 - Consider delivering hampers to the homes of persons in need rather than having them come to you.
3. Ensure volunteers stay home when they are sick. People with these symptoms may have COVID-19: cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing. They may also have COVID-19 if they have at least two of these symptoms: fever, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or a new loss of taste or smell. This list is not exhaustive.
4. Ensure volunteers practice good hygiene:
- Volunteer should wear masks
 - Volunteers should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for 20 seconds upon first arriving to work, after using the restroom, before and after eating and frequently throughout the day.
 - Advise employees and volunteers to avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth.
 - Make sure staff have easy access to proper hand washing, sanitation, and cleaning.
5. Frequently clean and sanitize food contact and food preparation surfaces.

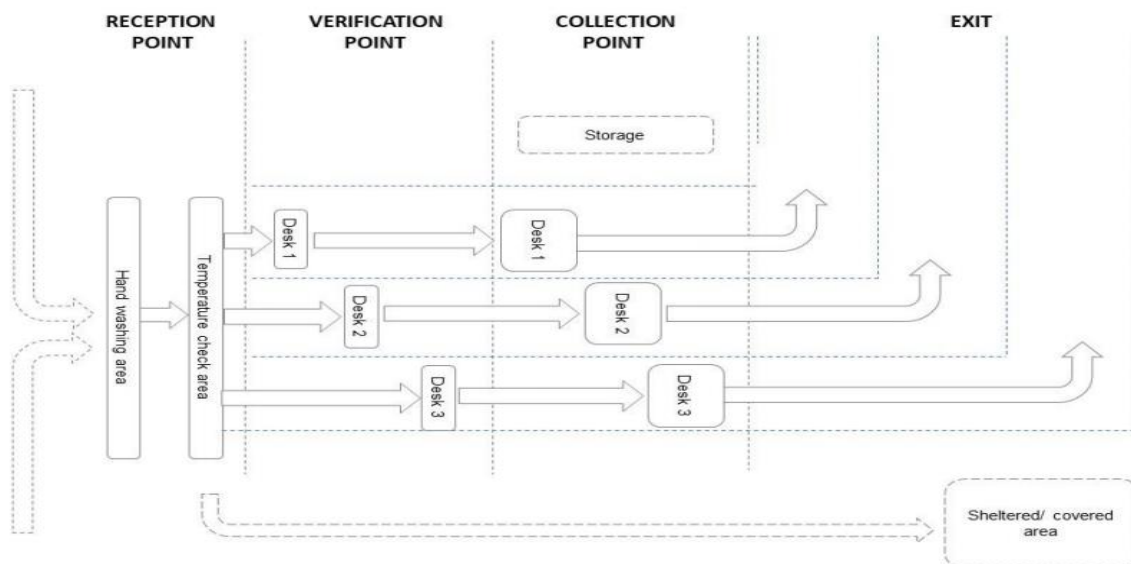
TIPS:

- Use soap and warm water to scrub surfaces, rinsing with clean water, then using an effective sanitizing solution approved for food contact surfaces, with a contact time of at least 30 seconds (i.e., one teaspoon of unscented household bleach in a gallon of cool water)
 - Ensure dishwasher and/or three-compartment sinks are used properly and have the appropriate level of sanitizer for final rinse (50-100 ppm chlorine-based sanitizer; follow product label for other approved sanitizers).
6. Follow environmental cleaning guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (e.g., clean and disinfect high touch surfaces daily or more frequently).

TIPS:

- For non-food contact surfaces and non-food preparation surfaces such as counter tops, dining tables, door knobs, electronics and faucet handles: utilize a disinfectant which is listed as effective against coronavirus.
7. Appoint a lead volunteer to ensure compliance with this guidance.²
 8. If you are unable to go to the homes of persons, the following are instructions for cooperating partners and volunteers at the distribution site:
 - Monitor the entry of beneficiaries into the distribution point channel.
 - Oversee and assist with offloading and organising rations before distributions are scheduled to start.
 - Step back from the ration and direct the beneficiary to collect the ration and leave via the marked exit route.
 - Instruct the beneficiaries to leave the distribution site immediately after the collection of rations.
 - On completion of distribution, ensure that the distribution point (room/ area/ tarpaulin) is swept clean and sprayed with disinfectant (0.5% chlorine solution). Once dry, the tarpaulin should be folded away for storage/transportation. The broom may be used again after spraying with bleach to remove any debris.
 - Remove all tapes, ropes and signage.
 - Clear hand wash station and remove/store hand washing solution.
 - It is mandatory that all staff at the distribution site perform hand sanitation and follow general hygiene practices.

Figure 1- Sample site plan for food distribution site in COVID-10 Environment



² <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/workplaces/retail/food-distribution.aspx>

Source: World Food Programme Recommendations for Adjusting Food Distribution Standard Operating Procedures in the Context Of The Covid-19, March 2020

4 Food and Beverages Most Suitable for Donations

Food and beverages that are most suitable for donations are healthy and in demand—able to meet the needs of the persons receiving the packages. Healthy eating is essential in order to optimize health, support healthy growth in children, prevent disease, and manage chronic conditions.

Healthy food and beverage donations include whole foods and minimally refined and processed foods and beverages, which contain:

- little or no added sugar
- little salt
- 2% trans-fat or less of total fat content for all soft spreadable margarine and oil; and 5% trans-fat or less of total fat content for all other foods.

4.1 Infant Formula

The GoRTT recognises breastfeeding as the optimal method of infant feeding. However, breastfeeding is not always an option for the mother. Infant formula should only be offered upon request. If infant formula is being provided, products **MUST NOT** exceed the expiry date.

Table 2- Healthy foods and beverages for grocery and meal programs

Healthy, in demand donation	What Makes it Healthy?
<p>Vegetables and Fruit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh vegetables and fruit • Canned vegetables and fruit, including unsweetened sauces and purees • Frozen vegetables and fruit • Dried vegetables and fruit • 100% fruit or vegetable juice 	<p>Pre-packaged products listing a vegetable or fruit (not sugar) as the first ingredient • Canned fruit packed in water or 100% juice • Canned vegetables and 100% vegetable juices with little or no added sodium.</p>
<p>Grain Products</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grains (e.g., rolled oats, pot barley, millet, brown basmati rice, wild rice, quinoa) • Noodles or pasta, especially whole grain • Hot and cold cereals, especially whole grain with little or no sugar added (e.g., oatmeal) • Bread, especially whole grain • Crackers, especially whole grain 	<p>Pre-packaged products listing a grain, especially a whole grain, as the first ingredient • All products meets the restriction of 5% trans-fat or less of total fat content*</p>
<p>Meat and Other High Protein Foods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh or frozen meat • Fresh or frozen poultry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean or extra lean meats and poultry • Pre-packaged meat, poultry, fish, and seafood with little or no added sodium

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh or frozen fish or seafood • Canned chunked poultry, especially chicken or turkey • Canned fish or seafood • Eggs • Dried or canned beans, peas, and lentils • Nuts and seeds and nut and seed butters (e.g., peanut butter, almond butter) • Soy products (e.g., tofu, tempeh) 	
<p>Milk and Alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Milk, including powdered, canned (evaporated) and shelf-stable UHT • Fortified soy beverages • Cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plain or unsweetened milk and milk alternatives
<p>Cooking and Baking Ingredients</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsaturated vegetable oils (e.g., coconut soybean, safflower) • Non-hydrogenated margarine • Grain flour, especially whole grain (e.g., whole wheat flour), including gluten-free options • Baking powder and baking soda • Spices and herbs; sauces and dressings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All soft spreadable margarine and oil meets the restriction of 2% trans-fat or less of total fat content • All other food meets the restriction of 5% trans-fat or less of total fat content • Sauces and dressings with little or no added sugar and sodium

5 Evaluating Foods for Safety

At times, the objective of offering the safest food possible may conflict with the objective of providing the most food, or the most nutritious food possible. Considering this, the GoRTT recommends that the following guidelines be used to prevent compromising food safety.

The following categories can help the hamper distributors determine the relative risks associated with several different kinds of food, and provide guidance on what precautions should be taken. Category 1 food is viewed as having the lowest risk. Categories 2, 3, and 4 have progressively higher relative risks.

The two most important ways to keep foods lower risk are cleanliness and temperature control. Moreover, it should be noted that distributors of hampers should make all efforts to store food items in a clean and safe environment, not leaving food on the floor, as this can create uncontrolled hazards.³

³ Centre for Disease Control BC- Guidelines for Food Distribution Organisations with Grocery or Meal Preparation. Available at <http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/EH/FPS/Food/FDO%20Guidelines%20with%20Grocery%20or%20Meal%20Program.pdf>

Table 4-Food Risk Categories

Category 1- Low Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Non perishable Food•eg canned foods, crackers, flour
Category 2- Low Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Perishable Foods•whole fresh vegetables and fruits
Category 3- High Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Potentially Hazardous Foods•milk, cheese, meats
Category 4- Highest Risk Foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•may be unacceptable for donations•eg. home canned milk, raw milk, uninspected meats, leftovers

5.1 Category 1: Lowest Risk No-Perishable Foods

This category includes non-perishable foods (items that do not require refrigeration), e.g. unrefrigerated pre-packed foods, canned or bottled products, and dry goods such as flour, sugar, pasta, breads, and pastries without cream fillings.

The following precautions should be followed when accepting category 1 foods:

- a) Sort and identify cans or jars that may not be safe for consumption.
- b) Ensure that labelling is in place when bulk packages are broken down into smaller quantities or repackaged.
- c) Evaluate best before dates (covered in more detail in next section). Large bags or containers of dry goods (flour, sugar, salt, dry cereal, etc.) may be repackaged. Repackaging should be done in proper facilities by people who have received some basic training in sanitation and food handling. Access to a hand sink and hand-washing are minimum requirements for this activity. If the safety of cans or jars is in question, contact your local health authority for advice.

5.2 Category 2: Low Risk Perishable Foods

Category 2 foods include perishable foods such as raw fruit and vegetables. Whole, intact raw fruits and vegetables are lower risk than sliced fruits and vegetables, which are also in this category.

Take the following precautions when accepting category 2 foods:

- a) Ensure refrigeration facilities are available for perishable foods.
- b) Evaluate best before dates on items such as commercially sliced raw fruits and vegetables.
- c) Refrigerate sliced fruits and vegetables or any produce with the natural coating (peel) removed at 4°C (40°F) or colder

5.3 Category 3: High Risk Potentially Hazardous Foods (PHF)

This category includes PHF (e.g., dairy products, eggs and egg products, tofu products, meat and meat products) from a commercial processor or retailer or a licensed restaurant, and may involve minor repackaging.

This category does not include home processed foods or un-inspected wild game. Precautions to be taken when accepting category 3 foods include:

- a) PHF must be kept at 4°C (40°F) or colder.
- b) Cooked vegetables and grain products must be hot-held at 60°C (140°F) or hotter, or properly cooled and held refrigerated at 4°C (40°F) or colder (or frozen).
- c) Milk and milk products (including cream and cream products, ice cream, frozen desserts, yogurt, and similar foods) must be pasteurized, held either refrigerated at 4°C (40°F) or colder or frozen at -18°C (0°F) or colder, and distributed in their original unopened containers.
- d) Meat and meat products should be held at 4°C (40°F) or colder or frozen at -18°C (0°F) or colder, and distributed in their original unopened packages. However, if large pieces of meat have been donated and further packaging such as cutting into smaller portions takes place, use appropriate equipment (e.g., stainless steel equipment, large sinks for washing and sanitizing, hand wash basins) and work areas.
- e) Repackaging should take place in a separate work area to prevent cross-contamination of finished, ready-to-eat food products.
- f) Meat and poultry may only be donated from an approved source, properly dressed, and if there has been no temperature abuse during storage or transportation.
- g) Poultry and poultry products: if large birds are donated and cutting is necessary, use appropriate equipment and work areas as described above for meat products, due to cross-contamination concerns with bacteria such as Salmonella.
- h) Packaging materials used for the finished product should be made of a material that will not contaminate the food product. New packaging should be used for foods that can be eaten without washing, e.g., fruit, vegetables (including salad), and bread products.
- i) Vacuum packaged or re-packaged PHF must be kept refrigerated or frozen, depending on the product.
- j) Personnel responsible for further processing (e.g., cutting of meat and poultry, or how to handle mouldy cheese products) must be trained.
- k) Eggs and egg products should be refrigerated. Only graded eggs should be used. Visibly cracked eggs should be discarded, unless the eggs are used in foods heated to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F) or hotter. .

5.4 Category 4: Highest Risk Foods

This category includes food that has been processed in the home environment, opened foods, or partially used foods from any source. These foods are viewed as being at highest risk because one cannot tell to what extent partially consumed food has been contaminated, or (in the case of home-processed foods) under what conditions the food was originally processed and stored. Organisations distributing food must be aware that these foods carry a higher risk.

5.5 Best Before Dates and Durable Dates

Best before dates (BBD) and durable (life) dates are equivalent terms. Regulatory agencies tend to use the latter term, while consumers are more familiar with BBD. BBD must accompany foods with a BBD of 90 days or less.

BBD only apply to unopened foods. Once food packaging is opened, the BBD date cannot be used as a guide. The most important issue to recognize is that the BBD is NOT an indicator of food safety. A BBD is only an indicator of food quality, meaning foods properly stored and handled should retain their nutritional and sensory (taste, smell, texture) qualities. Types of foods that may be acceptable to use past their BBD include:

- jams
- condiments
- yogurts and cheese dairy products
- frozen meats and meals
- room temperature stable Tetra Pak® juices
- refrigerated Tetra Pak® juices
- ketchup, mustard
- salsa, tomato sauce
- salad dressing
- breads
- low-risk baked goods

5.5.1 Use by Dates

The use by date is placed onto certain food ingredients, such as yeast. Companies use these dates to let consumers know the date to which effectiveness of the product is assured. It is perfectly acceptable to use foods, such as yeasts, after the use by date. (Note: yeast can be “proofed” to test effectiveness and avoid potential product losses due to yeast failure.)

5.6 Assessing Refrigerated and Frozen Perishable Foods

Many foods received by distribution organisations arrive in conditions that require staff and volunteers to make judgements about their suitability for beneficiaries. The foods need to be assessed for safety and quality. You should assess safety and quality of food by checking:

1. the donor’s information and history of the product prior to donation or purchase
2. the temperature of the food on arrival
3. how the food looks (in terms of packaging and sensory aspects)

4. how long the food has been held at temperatures above and below refrigeration temperatures 4°C (40°F) (if possible).

Table 5-Recommended Food Storage Times

Food Products	Hold in refrigeration temperatures of $\leq 4^{\circ}\text{C}$ (40°F)
Raw meats (beef, poultry, pork and sausage) 2 to 4 days	Raw meats (beef, poultry, pork and sausage) 2 to 4 days
Raw fish and shellfish 1 to 2 days	Raw fish and shellfish 1 to 2 days
Luncheon meats and hot-dogs opened: up to 1 week	Luncheon meats and hot-dogs opened: up to 1 week
unopened: up to 2 weeks	unopened: up to 2 weeks

6 Evaluating Packaging

When selecting packaged foods, distributing organisations will need to make some judgements on the acceptability of the food. Possible reasons for rejecting food include:

1. damage to packaging affecting the safety or suitability of the contents
2. expiry dates on packages are exceeded
3. the donated food product has been subject to a recall
4. food has been mishandled (e.g., poor temperature control, exposed to spills or infestation) and is no longer safe for human consumption

For example, excessive damage to packaging so that the internal contents are leaking or exposed, would be considered unacceptable packaging damage. Damage to packaging can occur in many ways: physical mishandling, insect and rodent damage, signs of spills or stains of unknown origin, if the label itself has been damaged so that the contents are unknown, or if crucial information about the product (e.g., ingredients, allergens, BBD) is unknown. Note: products with missing labels may be accepted when the donor provides documentation of the product and its contents (i.e., ingredients, allergens, BBD), and/or the FDO labels the product with information received from the donor.

6.1 Serious Defects to Cans

Defects occur when the canning process is flawed and a proper seal does not occur, from damage (dents) to the exterior of the can from rough handling, from the contents of the can, from environmental conditions, or from any combination of factors that compromise the can's integrity. Some types of can defects include:

1. sharp dents or dents in the seam;
2. corrosion marks, pitting, rusting, or leaking from the can;
3. swollen or bulging cans;
4. damage to the can ends;
5. score marks on the can that may affect the integrity of the metal; and

6. cut seams, punctures, or damage to the score line (for pull-tab type cans) that may result in pinholes or leakage. Moderate dents that do not compromise the seams are acceptable if not past best before dates.

Signs of insects or rodents on packaging donated or purchased and recovered foods are not useable if there are signs of insect and rodent damage. Rodent droppings may carry diseases that could be transferred by touching packaging as well as eating foods. Personnel handling foods should practice regular hand-washing, including before and after handling; and wearing gloves, if these are used, to protect themselves and others. The signs of rodent droppings on packages or in boxes of foods include:

- urine marks either visible to the eye or visible under black light (UV light)
- casings or webs left behind by insects on packaging
- damage to packaging caused by rodents

7 Personal Hygiene

In addition to adhering to the Ministry of Health's guidelines such as social distancing and wearing face masks, it is strongly recommended that all operators, employees, and volunteers that work in direct contact with food should:

- maintain a high degree of personal cleanliness
- wear clean outer garments and some form of hair restraint
- wash their hands and exposed portions of their arms thoroughly in an adequate hand-washing facility: - before starting work - after visiting the toilet - after smoking - after eating - after handling raw meat or poultry - after handling foods containing allergens - as often as necessary
- avoid eating food, drinking beverages, or using tobacco in any form in areas where food is exposed or in areas used for washing equipment or utensils
- never work while ill with a disease that is communicable through food (e.g., Hepatitis A). (Organisers should be particularly vigilant with regard to persons with symptoms such as diarrhea, vomiting, jaundice, or infected cuts/boils)

8 Food Transportation and Vehicles

Foods that are potentially hazardous and require refrigeration are vulnerable to temperature abuse. This increases the risks for food safety hazards and for spoilage. There are some preventative controls that hamper distributors can take while food is in their care during transport.

These controls are taken from Dr. John Ryan's Guide to Food Safety and Quality During Transportation:

- appropriate temperature control during transport. Ensure appropriate temperatures are maintained: perishable foods should be transported in vehicles with mechanical refrigeration or transported in chilled chest coolers.⁴
- sanitation controls that include: - monitoring and ensuring sanitation of the vehicle - pest control - sanitation during loading and unloading procedures
- appropriate packaging and packing of food products (good quality pallets)
- good communication between distribution organisations and the beneficiaries
- employee awareness and training

Vehicles used to transport food should be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition to protect food from contamination. A regular vehicle cleaning and sanitation schedule is recommended. For example, a vehicle that has been used for transporting trash must not be used to transport food until it has been thoroughly cleaned. Foods in vehicles should be kept covered at all times to protect them from dust, insects, and other sources of contaminants. Clean containers, cooler chests, and packaging for transporting foods should be used (e.g., boxes for canned food). Reusable containers should likewise be regularly cleaned and sanitized. Loading areas and docks should be kept clean and free of debris so that incoming foods do not become contaminated. Incoming foods should be temperature checked and put away as soon as possible to get them back under (refrigerated or frozen) temperature control.

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⁴ Ryan JM. Guide to food safety and quality during transportation. Controls, standards and practices. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, Elsevier; 2014. Available from: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/book/9780124077751>