

Serving Meals at Extension Events During COVID-19

As we continue to experience drastic community spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 in our state, we recommend suspending food service of any kind including meals and tastings/sampling at any Extension events at present. The food is not the concern, it is the unmasking needed to eat and drink as well as touching of utensils/drinkware/dishes, sharing of eating surfaces that increases the risk of transmitting the virus.

If food must be a part of the event a plan to manage the risk of COVID-19 transmission should be written and approved by CEDs. If the CED is holding the event, then the DED should review the written plan and approve. If there are questions or concerns about a plan or event, CEDs should consult with their DED. Individuals should bring their own lunches/dinner/snacks, and be asked to consume these foods outside (not inside), with at least 6 feet of distance from each other. There should be no sharing of food among participants, no buffet lines (for example, common pizza boxes or bbq).

If participants cannot bring their own food, prepackaged food is an option. Prepackaged food, however, does not mitigate the risk of removing masks inside for eating and drinking. Prepackaged food should be eaten outdoors, with at least 6 feet of distance from each other.

In order to serve prepackaged food, you must minimize the number of people who handle the food. Participants should not handle food or drinks – only food service providers should serve the food. There should be NO buffet or family style meals served. Participants should not congregate together in a line to pick up their meal. Meals and drinks should be served at the eating location. Participants should be reminded of handwashing and shown where hand sanitizer is located prior to the meal breaks.

If you serve meals or allow individuals to bring in their own meals, we highly recommend that all individuals serving meals or offering meals should take part in the **Count on Me NC** online training. This will help insure that everyone understands the risks involved in meal service and that they understand that:

- All servers should wear face coverings
- Safe sanitation practices are followed
- Indoor and outdoor seating meets all physical distancing guidelines (at least 6 feet between participants)
- Hand sanitizer and handwashing stations are available
- Tables and hard surfaces are cleaned and disinfected
- Single-use condiments are utilized

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