



Multnomah County Health Department

Food Safety for Indigent or Needy People

Multnomah County currently estimates that almost 16,000 – 18,000 persons experience homelessness annually and 4,000 persons may experience homelessness on any given night. *The mission of Multnomah County Environmental Services includes ensuring that homeless or needy persons have secure food sources which are safe, easily accessible and nutritious.*

Why is safe food particularly important for indigent and homeless people?

Wholesome food is critical for homeless persons because without housing and other social and economic resources, individuals can become especially vulnerable to food borne illnesses and their consequences.

What is the risk of providing home prepared food to people who are hungry?

If the food is not properly acquired, stored, prepared, handled and distributed it could make the recipient very ill. Food borne illnesses are caused by bacteria that live on or in food, and can cause nausea, diarrhea, fever and vomiting, among other symptoms. Simple measures like cooking meats at specific temperatures, storing food and holding food at specific temperatures, or establishing proper hand washing stations can help reduce food borne illnesses. All licensed facilities, temporary or permanent, are required to establish such practices to protect the public from health concerns.

What does Environmental Health Services consider safe food?

Multnomah County requires that facilities that serve food to the public are approved to meet Oregon Department of Agriculture statutes, primarily in an effort to prevent food and water borne illnesses. Safe food must come from an approved source, such as a Multnomah County Environmental Health Specialist, and be prepared in an approved kitchen or prepared on-site under temporary restaurant requirements without licensing. No home-prepared foods are allowed.

How could I provide safe food that meets the requirements of Oregon laws?

Providing safe food for the homeless is easy. Most soup kitchens, churches and other benevolent organizations helping to provide safe food to the homeless have kitchens that have been evaluated on a twice yearly basis and have an operating license. Benevolent organizations have 501 c(3) tax status and generally operate for charitable purposes, and can not charge or solicit payment for the food being served.

Are there alternatives to providing food through a benevolent organization?

1. Yes, you may obtain donated food from a licensed facility such as a restaurant or grocery store and transport it directly to the site where food will be provided. It must be transported and consumed within four hours of receipt.
2. Donate to the Oregon Food Bank or another organization that provides food or meals. Call 1 800 777 7427 or visit info@oregonfoodbank.org

How do I learn more about preparing safe meals?

Obtain a brochure titled "Preparing Safe Meals" from Multnomah County Environmental Health. Call 503-988-3400 or check out the food safety links at www.mchealthinspect.org.

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