COVID-19 Emergency Response
Guidelines for Hosting Congregations
June 30, 2020

Resuming Hosting

We anticipate resuming hosting on August 2, though this could change if public health guidance changes. There will be four families in the program for the foreseeable future, requiring a single hosting site. We will choose the hosting site from those currently scheduled for each week based on which can provide for the greatest social distancing. We'll also consider the congregations’ proximity to the program centers, volunteer capacity, and other available amenities for families, such as access to nearby walking trails or parks.

We will be asking congregations to host families all day on Saturdays, as is the practice in the Southwest network. When we’re running one loop with congregations from both networks, we need as much consistency in practices as possible. If hosting all day on Saturdays absolutely will not work for a congregation, we’ll work together to find an alternative.

Beacon’s congregational organizers will be in touch with hosting congregations to discuss returning to hosting. We want to hear from host coordinators and clergy about their facilities and their own plans for re-opening. What are the advantages of your building and some of its challenges? What else will be going on in your congregation during your hosting week? What are you looking forward to and what are your worries as hosting resumes?

Organizers will be contacting host coordinators and clergy in the order that their hosting weeks come up on the schedule.

Meals

All of the congregations scheduled to host during a particular week will be asked to help with meals. We’ll determine which congregations are responsible for which meals as we choose the hosting sites with input from the congregations scheduled for each week. In some cases, additional congregations will be asked to help with meals, as well.
We ask that food for breakfast be delivered to the hosting site prior to the start of the hosting week. Beacon organizers will connect the host coordinators from the congregation providing breakfast with the congregation hosting site so they can arrange for a convenient delivery time.

Families will have lunch at the program center Sunday through Friday. Congregations providing food for lunches can deliver it to the Chaska program center on Monday of their hosting week between 8 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Dinner each evening and lunch on Saturday will be served at the hosting site. Dinners can be delivered to the hosting site by 5 p.m. for service at 5:30 p.m. Lunch delivery times will be set by the host coordinator at the hosting site. We'll ensure the host coordinators for the site and the congregation providing the meals are able to connect for any site-specific instructions.

For these meals, we’re asking that congregations provide ready-to-eat meals that have been prepared in a commercial kitchen or that have been picked up from a restaurant. If the meal needs to be plated on-site, provide one to two volunteers to serve the food and clean-up. Alternatively, the meals can be packaged for each individual or family (i.e. already in boxes or on plates or divided into family packages) and dropped off at the hosting site. Volunteers should wear masks. To limit the number of people who touch the serving containers and utensils, plan to fill plates for each person rather than setting food out buffet-style. Please provide the gloves and utensils you’ll need for serving, paper plates and flatware needed for dining.

We'll ask the hosting site to provide simple snacks for families. We suggest packaged single-serving items that can be placed somewhere for families to help themselves. We also recommend that families be allowed to enjoy snacks in their bedrooms to promote social distancing.

**Health and Safety**

We ask all volunteers to review the guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control on how to protect yourself and others](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/guidance.html). These are the key practices that will keep shelter guests, volunteers, and staff healthy.

- Wash your hands
- Avoid close contact
- Cover your mouth and nose
- Clean and disinfect
- Stay home if you’re sick
Wash your hands

To make it easy for volunteers and guests to wash their hands frequently:

- Make as many sinks as possible available for handwashing. Post signs to draw attention to them. Ensure there is plenty of soap and paper towels.
- Place hand sanitizer in as many places as you can, including at entrances to the building and rooms, in family bedrooms, and in the kitchen and dining spaces.
- Post signs to remind people to wash their hands and with instructions for doing it well.

If you’re having trouble finding soap and hand sanitizer, let your organizer know. We may be able to help.

Avoid Close Contact

Avoiding close contact by social distancing in shelter can be really challenging. To start, there are often space limitations that make it difficult to put six feet between each person. Equally significant, social distance doesn’t come naturally to many of us and it’s particularly difficult for children. We want to greet others with a handshake, pat on the arm or a hug. We’re accustomed to standing or sitting next to someone for conversation. We like to do things together – share a meal around a table, drive toy trucks around on the floor, play games in a gym, and so much more. As we develop new habits, it’s important that we work together, be patient and offer kind reminders.

Limit the number of volunteers

Possibly the most significant thing hosting congregations can do to promote social distancing is to limit the number of volunteers on-site. We know that hosting is often a whole-community effort involving many, many people. But, as we work together to stop the spread of COVID-19 and protect shelter guests and volunteers, it’s important that we involve as few people as possible.

Many congregations will also find that they have fewer people available to volunteer. Seniors and people with health conditions that put them at greater risk from COVID-19 should not volunteer.

Hosting during this period of social distancing will require fewer volunteers. Families will spend more time with only the members of their own household. They’ll be in their bedrooms more. There is no expectation of planned group activities for adults or children at hosting congregations.

We’re asking congregations to host families with not more than three volunteers on-site at any time the families are present. You might have a couple volunteers greet guests and show them around the first day, have one volunteer to greet and assist the volunteers providing meals, and have two people who are available to assist families in the evenings and overnight. In addition, you might want to have a few volunteers...
focused on cleaning before and after you host and during the day when families aren’t present. (There’s more on cleaning later in this guidance.)

**Adapt family bedrooms**

It’s especially important that each family have their own room. They will spend more time than usual in their rooms, so anything congregations can do to make them comfortable will be appreciated. Chairs and tables enable families to play games, work on projects, or study. Floor space allows children to move and play. Wifi access provides opportunities for study, communication with friends and family, and entertainment. If there is a television, families can watch their favorite shows or enjoy a movie together.

If possible, make games, toys, craft supplies, movies, books or other things families can do together available for families to take to their rooms. When they’re returned, make sure they’re cleaned before they’re passed on to other families (see information about cleaning).

**Distance at dinner**

To ensure social distancing, please provide each family with it’s own table to use every night they are staying in your congregation. Space tables at least six feet apart.

If you do not have a room for dining that allows for separate, well-spaced tables, consider whether families could eat in multiple rooms or, if necessary, take their meals back to their bedrooms.

**Provide visible cues and reminders**

In places where people might naturally line-up or stand close together for other reasons, use signs, placards, tape on the floor or stanchions with ropes as a reminder to maintain social distance. Places where people might find themselves waiting are often good spots for these reminders. For example, marking spots for people to stand when waiting for dinner or for the bus might be helpful.

**Offer room to spread out**

Consider other activities in and near your congregation that individual families can enjoy together while avoiding close contact with other families and volunteers. Do you have a gym or other large room they could use one at a time (with cleaning in-between uses)? Are the dining tables spaced adequately that those tables can be used at other times? Is there a place for television or movies that can be used in a way that allows for social distancing? Are there nearby walking trails, parks or other green spaces they could visit? Also, provide outdoor toys like frisbees, balls and sidewalk chalk for families to use when they’re outside. Make sure these items are cleaned between uses.
Gently remind children

Social distancing is particularly hard for small children and those who care for them. Consistency is the key. Staff members have been working with parents on ways to help their children maintain social distance. Please expect you may need to constantly remind kids to distance with smiles and laughter. You can give young kids "tasks" to do that involve redirecting back to their family.

Limit access to hosting spaces

We know that congregational staff and members may be using space in your building during your hosting week. Please ensure that these folks know and adhere to public health guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19. If possible, ask that they not use spaces being used for hosting. If it’s necessary to share some spaces, ensure that other building users follow the guidance in this document.

Cover your mouth and nose

All volunteers, adult and teenaged shelter guests, and any other people in your building should wear cloth face coverings when in shared spaces (except when eating meals). Beacon has provided cloth masks for shelter guests and staff.

The CDC has information about cloth face coverings and how to make them. There are also a growing number of opportunities to purchase cloth masks online. If you have trouble procuring masks for your volunteers, let your organizer know.

Clean and Disinfect

It is more important than ever to keep hosting spaces clean. Plan to thoroughly clean hosting spaces when you are setting up to host and after your hosting week and to clean shared spaces while families are away during the day. Volunteers do not need to clean families’ bedrooms during the hosting week; families will take care of those spaces. Cleaners should wear disposable gloves while cleaning and wash their hands when they’re finished. Clean with soap and water and approved disinfectants. If you need assistance finding supplies, let your organizer know.

In addition, please:

- Ask volunteers to clean frequently touched surfaces once an hour. Include doorknobs, handrails, keypads, counters, tables, chairs and elevator buttons.
- Provide each family with wipes so that they can keep their bedrooms clean.
- Provide wipes in restrooms so that families can wipe off fixtures each time they use them.
- Clean all toys and shared items between uses. This includes outdoor equipment like frisbees and balls.
Make sure there are trash receptacles available in each space so that cleaning wipes, paper towels and tissues can be discarded immediately. Use no-touch receptacles, if possible, with liners and empty them regularly.

In the kitchen, clean and disinfect surfaces, including door handles and appliances. Ensure that everyone using the kitchen washes their hands frequently and wears gloves and a mask. Use disposable plates, cups and cutlery. Limit the number of people who touch serving containers and utensils, by filling plates for each guest rather than serving food buffet-style.

**Stay Home if You’re Sick**

We will find other accommodations for families who are sick; we will not send families with a sick member to a hosting congregation. Likewise, please ask your volunteers to stay home if they are sick. And, have a contingency plan in place in case you have to replace an ill volunteer with short notice.

In the event a family member develops symptoms of COVID-19 while at the hosting congregation, isolate them immediately and call the shelter staff’s emergency line (612-767-9513). Our staff will work with the family to contact the Department of Health for assessment and address any needs for transportation for testing or care as quickly as possible.

In the event a volunteer or another person using your building becomes ill with COVID-19, please let shelter manager, Rebekah Schneider (rschneider@beaconinterfaith.org or 952-261-9397), know so that we can take steps to notify families and take other precautions.

**Take Time to Reflect on Your Hosting Experience**

Why do you do this work? How does it inform your faith? What have you learned about yourself, about homelessness, or about our community? Our organizing team has developed a [hosting reflection](#) for congregation volunteers. They’d also love to hear about your experiences. Call your organizer to learn more.

**Resources**

[Minnesota Department of Health](#)
[Center for Disease Control](#)