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Considerations for Senior Center and Congregate Nutrition Site Re-Opening

As stay-at-home restrictions are relaxed, senior centers and congregate nutrition sites should strategically plan when and how best to reopen. Two of the signposts the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention believes must exist before facilities relax stay-at-home orders are:

- Will reopening be in compliance with state and local orders?
- Will you be ready to protect clients and staff who are at higher risk for severe illness? (e.g. teleworking, tasks that minimize contact)

Building upon this and guidance from Administration for Community Living and the National Council on Aging, the following guidelines to re-opening senior centers and/or congregate nutrition sites, which will be referenced as “center,” have been developed:

1. Comply with governmental guidance

States and the federal government have outlined guardrails that should be in place before reopening. On the federal level, the White House has published guidelines for “Opening Up America Again.” At the state level, Indiana has detailed what reopening will look like when Governor Holcomb released a “Roadmap to Get Back on Track.” State and city guidelines must be closely reviewed and followed.

2. Make a plan

Pre-opening planning will be vitally important to the success of your center’s reopening. Consider establishing facility protocols that consists of:

- a. Sanitizing schedule of facility and equipment
- b. Reviewing stock of cleaning supplies
- c. Establishing multiple hand sanitizing stations
- d. Redoing seating to maintain physical distance
- e. Programming for current recommended gathering size
- f. Maintain daily sign-up records for potential contact tracking purposes
- g. Ensuring that ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible; and
- h. Planning to close centers, if needed



3. Open incrementally

- a. Consider a step-wise approach to reopening so that the center may quickly identify and address any practical challenges presented.
- b. Identify what services can be done via telehealth or other modalities and continue to perform those visits remotely.
- c. Begin with a few in-person center days, working on a modified schedule.
- d. Ideas for Initial On-Site Programming
 - Begin with small group programs based on current recommended group guidelines
 - Begin with lower risk activities (not aerobic, not singing)
 - Limited days—2 or 3 days a week
 - Begin with those under 65, no chronic conditions
 - Open larger centers first, then smaller centers
 - Start small, limit class size, with participants 6 feet apart.
 - Provide small sized groups, support groups, creative writing and discussion.
 - Ask participants to sign up and let them know there is a limit to the class size.
 - Establish flexible refund policy if participant is not feeling well and cannot attend an event/program.
- e. Direct administrative staff who do not need to be physically present in the center to stay at home and work remotely.
- f. Consider bringing employees back in phases, or working on alternating days or different parts of the day, as this will reduce contact. Communicate your weekly schedule clearly to the clients and staff.

4. Institute safety measures for staff and clients

- a. To ensure that clients are not coming into close contact with one another, utilize a modified schedule to avoid high volume or density.
- b. Designate separate dining and activity areas.
- c. Consider a flexible schedule, with staggering clients and staff in mornings and afternoons.
- d. Consistent with U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance, centers should have the following policies and procedures established prior to re-opening:
 - **Daily Health Self-Screening**
 - Information about COVID-19 symptoms may be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [website](#).
 - **Temperature Checking:**
 - Staff should conduct a daily self-assessment before leaving home to come to work. Staff should take their temperature.
 - Staff should conduct a daily client-assessment before allowing the client to enter the congregate meal site, or senior center. Staff should take the client's temperature.

- If staff or client has a fever at or above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, they should stay home.
- If staff or client has a fever and symptoms such as a cough or trouble breathing, they should stay home and contact a health care provider
- **Self-Screening:**
 - Before staff or clients enter the center, center personnel should obtain the following information daily:
 - ✓ Have you had close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 14 days?
 - ✓ Are you currently ill? Do you have symptoms of a cold, cough, or shortness of breath? Have you temporarily lost your sense of taste or smell?
 - ✓ Do you currently have a fever or have you had a fever within the past week?
- **Staff and Clients Tested for COVID-19:**
 - If staff or client tests positive for COVID-19, they should contact their health care provider.
- **Staff and Clients Testing Positive May Return to the Center Once:**
 - They have been symptom free for a minimum of 72 hours. – AND–
 - At least 10 days have passed since the onset of their symptoms.
 - Staff and clients testing negative may return to the center 48 hours after their symptoms have subsided.
- **Social Distancing in the Center**
 - Proper social distancing means maintaining 6 feet of distance from another person.
 - Staff and clients should practice social distancing at all times while at the center.
 - Policy in place to request a participant to leave if they are not adhering to distancing established.
 - Dining areas will ensure tables are safely spaced and cleaned in seating area.
- **Masks and Gloves**
 - Staff and clients must obtain and wear a reusable mask in the congregate nutrition site or senior center.
 - Encourage staff and clients to use their own personal, reusable mask to reduce the use of disposable masks.
 - Masks must be sanitized after each use.
 - Cloth masks or simple surgical masks are acceptable.
 - Staff and clients should review the [CDC's guidance](#) about how to appropriately use and maintain masks.
 - Gloves should only be worn by staff who are handling and preparing meals and cleaning and sanitizing or exchanging items with individuals they are servicing.

- **Center Cleanliness**
 - All internal doors will be propped open if it is safe to do so. This decreases the need for staff and clients to touch door handles and maximizes air flow.
 - Staff and clients should wash hands regularly throughout the course of the day.
 - Water fountains should only be used for filling water bottles.
 - Pooled vehicles will be equipped with wipes or spray bottles. Staff will be required to wipe down vehicles before and after use.
 - Staff will clean hard surfaces and frequently touched surfaces multiple times a day.
 - If client or staff tests positive for COVID-19 and was in the center 72 hours prior to taking the test, the center will complete disinfecting of the center prior to admitting any clients. The center should be evacuated and staff and clients may return to the area 48 hours once the disinfecting has been completed.
 - Cleaning will be performed in compliance with the latest [CDC guidelines](#).
- **Visitor Policies**
 - Visitors to the center (other than clients) should be by appointment only until further notice. The self-screening questions shall be shared as well as temperature taken before the visitor is allowed entrance to the center.
 - Provide hand sanitizer to all visitors to use before and after entering the center.
 - Social distancing guidelines should be maintained.
- **Processing Emotions in a Healthy Way**
 - Staff and client mental health is just as important as their physical health and it is normal to need help processing all the changes in their personal and professional lives. There are many healthy ways to help with this, including:
 - ✓ Encourage staff and clients to practice mindfulness.
 - ✓ Make active time to listen to staff and clients process thoughts and feelings out loud or in a journal.
 - ✓ Help staff and clients seek other resources to help manage mental health such as [BeWellIndiana.org](#), a free resource to help all Hoosiers stay connected and maintain their wellbeing.

5. Communicate health and safety requirements clearly to staff and clients.

- a. Staff and clients should have knowledge of items listed above in 4(d).
- b. Regular communication should be disbursed by Area Agencies on Aging to staff, clients and informal supports as a reminder of health and safety measures as well as proper protocols during this public health crisis.
- c. Establish staff training to:
 - ✓ Communicate new staff responsibilities
 - ✓ Train staff on space sanitation and PPE use

- ✓ Train staff on safe delivery of food and sanitation
- ✓ Train staff on handling money
- ✓ Train staff on communicating the new normal protocols to participants
- d. Centers are encouraged to use different forms of communication, such as phone calls, letters, emails, and text messages.

6. Coordinate testing with local hospitals and clinics

- a. There will be instances where staff and clients require COVID-19 testing. Contact the Indiana State Department of Health or your local health department for information on available testing sites. Identify several testing sites in the center's catchment area. Contact these sites to ensure that tests are available and to understand the turnaround time on testing results.
- b. Provide clear and up to date information to staff, clients and informal supports regarding where staff and clients can be tested and how the process works.

7. Establish confidentiality / institute privacy or update confidentiality, privacy and data security protocols.

- a. Results of any screenings of staff and clients should be kept in employment or client records only (but separate from the personnel file for staff). Remember that HIPAA authorizations are necessary for sharing information about staff and clients. Similarly, coworkers and clients can be informed that they came into contact with an individual who tested positive for COVID-19, but the identity of the individual and details about an individual's symptoms cannot be shared with clients or co-workers without consent. While certain HIPAA requirements related to telemedicine are not being enforced during the COVID-19 public health emergency, generally, HIPAA privacy, security and breach notification requirements must continue to be followed.