



Senator George J. Mitchell
Center for Sustainability Solutions

Reopening Reuse

COVID-19 Safety for Community Reuse in Maine

Brienne Berry, PhD Candidate, University of Maine

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About this guide

This document is a collection of guidance, best practices, and current policies adopted by federal and state government, as well as other Maine thrift stores to assist community-based thrift stores in deciding whether and how to reopen safely during the coronavirus outbreak. Our understanding of the virus is emergent, and the resources linked to in this document should be referenced for the most up-to-date information. A list of useful resources for COVID-19 and coronavirus spread can be found at the end of this document. *This document is a compilation of available resources, and should not be used as a replacement for medical advice.*

Author Information

Brie Berry is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Maine. She is a member of the Materials Management Research Group at the Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions at the University of Maine and a Legislative Graduate Fellow with the Maine Chapter of Scholars Strategy Network. Her research focuses on the meaning and value of reuse in rural Maine communities.

For more information, contact: brienne.berry@maine.edu

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Reopening Reuse: Summary for Decision-makers

Across the state of Maine there are small, community-based thrift stores, furniture banks, yard sales, secondhand shops, antique stores, auctions, and flea markets struggling to determine how to reopen amid concerns about the spread of COVID-19. Uncertain about the safety of accepting donations, welcoming patrons, or staffing volunteers, many organizations have reduced their services or temporarily halted operations. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for reopening community-based reuse organizations. Decisions about how, when, and whether to reopen will hinge upon space, staffing, community and organizational needs, and the nature of the outbreak in the community, to name only a few considerations. The key considerations for deciding on a reopening strategy are bulleted below, and are discussed in greater detail throughout this guide.

Keeping People Safe

- **Maintaining social distance** (about 6 feet) between people is critical to reducing transmission. Post signs to ensure distance is maintained.
- Patrons, volunteers, and staff should **wear face coverings**. Post signs to alert patrons of this policy.
- **Limit crowds**. Assign a volunteer or staff person to monitor entrances to keep the number of patrons to no more than 5 customers per 1,000 square feet of store space.
- **Create barriers** between patrons and staff/volunteers. Install plexiglass shields at cash desks and limit physical contact associated with accepting donations.

Creating Safe Spaces

- **Maximize ventilation**. Open windows and circulate air to reduce the likelihood that aerosols will spread the virus.
- **Widen aisles and make them one-direction only**. Give patrons, staff, and volunteers as much space as possible in aisles. Put down floor markers to ensure one-way traffic within the shop.
- **Provide social distance markers** to remind patrons to stay a safe distance apart.
- **Clean and sanitize** frequently touched surfaces.
- **Close fitting rooms or quarantine items that have been tried on**.

Accepting Donations Safely

- **Quarantine donations** for several days to allow any live virus to die to reduce the risk of transmission.
- Have donors **sort their own donations** to minimize staff/volunteer contact with items.

Consider Alternatives to a Traditional Reopening

If reopening feels too risky for patrons, staff, or volunteers, consider alternative strategies (see “Contactless Reopening” on page 11 for more) that reduce or eliminate contact with patrons while maintaining the important social benefits of reopening for volunteers and staff.



Introduction

Reuse is part of the fabric of Maine. All across the state there are small, community-based thrift stores, furniture banks, yard sales, secondhand shops, antique stores, auctions, and flea markets (to name just a few!) that help people get rid of things they no longer need and help others access goods they might not otherwise be able to find or afford. Many reuse organizations make goods available at no or low cost to patrons, and oftentimes they use their profits to fund social services like food pantries, support for local schools and health facilities, or cultural institutions. Reuse means different things to different people – it's a treasure hunt, a chance to meet with friends, an opportunity to serve the community, a way to clean out the clutter, and a way to meet basic needs.

As with so many things, COVID-19 has disrupted the important work that was being done in community reuse organizations all over the state. Uncertain about the safety of accepting donations, welcoming patrons, or staffing volunteers, many organizations have reduced their services or temporarily halted operations. This document incorporates research findings on the meaning and value of reuse, as well as guidance from state and federal health officials, the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, and other resources to help community reuse organizations make decisions about reopening safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution for reopening community-based reuse organizations. Decisions about how, when, and whether to reopen will hinge upon space, staffing, community and organizational needs, and the nature of the outbreak in the community, to name only a few considerations. There are risks associated with reopening – particularly for thrift stores staffed by volunteers, who tend to be older and therefore at greater risk of experiencing serious illness from COVID-19 – but there are also risks associated with remaining closed. Many volunteers derive important social benefits from their work in thrift stores and community reuse organizations, and reuse is helpful to those experiencing economic instability because it allows them access to low-cost goods – something particularly important right now. This document is intended to help community reuse organizations balance the risks and benefits of reopening in ways that make sense for their volunteers, employees, patrons, and donors.



Coronavirus Basics

Preventing Illness

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. In general, the more closely a person interacts with others and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread.

- **Maintain social distance (about 6 feet).**¹ The closer you are to other people who may be infected, the greater your risk of getting sick. Indoor spaces are more risky than outdoor spaces where it might be harder to keep people apart and there's less ventilation.²
- **Wash your hands often with soap and water** for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.³
- **Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.**⁴ This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.
- **Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face covering when around others.** You can spread COVID-19 to others even if you do not feel sick. The cloth face covering is meant to protect other people in case you are infected, and is not a substitute for social distancing.⁵

Monitor Your Health

- **Be alert for symptoms.** Watch for fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID-19.⁶
- **Take your temperature** if symptoms develop. Don't take your temperature within 30 minutes of exercising or after taking medications that could lower your temperature, like acetaminophen.

How the Virus Spreads

- The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person to person, **mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs,**

¹ CDC, "Social Distancing," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, February 11, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>.

² CDC, "Deciding to Go Out," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, February 11, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/deciding-to-go-out.html>.

³ CDC, "When and How to Wash Your Hands," April 23, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>.

⁴ CDC, "Cleaning & Disinfecting," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, February 11, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html>.

⁵ CDC, "Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, February 11, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>.

⁶ CDC, "Symptoms of COVID-19," *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>.



sneezes, or talks, or through aerosols (suspended air particles)⁷. These droplets and particles can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Spread is more likely when people are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).⁸

- **It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.** This is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads, but we are still learning more about this virus.⁹

⁷ Jim Daley, “What Scientists Know About Airborne Transmission of the New Coronavirus,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 12, 2020, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-scientists-know-about-airborne-transmission-new-coronavirus-180975547/>.

⁸ CDC, “Spread,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, February 11, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>.

⁹ CDC, “How COVID-19 Spreads,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>.



Recommendations

Reuse organizations vary widely in their resources, staff/volunteer capacity, physical layouts, and needs. **There is no single recommendation that will work for every reuse organization.** Open-air swap shops at waste transfer stations will need to adopt very different policies and protocols than community thrift stores, for example. The recommendations listed below are based on a multi-year research project on the meaning and value of reuse in Maine, best practices from other reuse organizations, and the most recent science and public policy on COVID-19. The recommendations below offer different pathways for reuse organizations to reopen based on their needs, resources, and risk perceptions.

Reopen on a Limited Basis

Research suggests that reuse is helpful to people. It provides people with access to goods that they need and might not be otherwise able to afford. Community reuse organizations often make goods available at no or low cost to patrons – a service that is even more critical in times of economic uncertainty. As unemployment levels rise, more people may benefit from reuse than ever before. If making goods available to people in need is a priority, there are several possible protocols that might be adopted.

The Maine Department of Economic and Community Development¹⁰ has advised that thrift stores should use the COVID-19 industry guidance document for retail businesses.¹¹ The U.S. Center for Disease Control has also issued guidance on workplace safety for waste workers who come into contact with discards.¹² The following guidelines are adapted from those two documents.

Employee & Volunteer Safety

- Require employees and volunteers to **wear cloth face coverings** and to **practice good hand hygiene** with frequent handwashing.
- Avoid crowding by **staggering shifts** and meal breaks.
- Ensure workers/volunteers **stay 6 feet apart**.
- **Prohibit gatherings** or meetings of 10 or more.
- **Limit interaction between workers and those donating goods.** Implement touchless receiving practices.
- **Discourage workers from sharing** work tools.

¹⁰ Department of Economic and Community Development, “Phase 1: Retail Businesses,” 1, accessed July 22, 2020, <https://www.maine.gov/decd/checklists/retail-businesses>.

¹¹ Personal Communication, “COVID-19 & Community Thrift Stores,” July 14, 2020.

¹² CDC, “What Waste Collectors and Recyclers Need to Know about COVID-19,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/waste-collection-recycling-workers.html>.



- Provide training:
 - Physical distancing guidelines and expectations
 - Monitoring personal health
 - Proper wear, removal, disposal of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - Laundering of face coverings
 - Cleaning protocols
 - Safe de-escalation techniques for patrons who are unwilling to follow safety precautions.

Patron Safety

- Patrons should **wear cloth face coverings**.
- **Inform your customers** of your COVID policies and procedures in advance – try posting your new procedures on Facebook or via email lists, if you use these tools.
- **Place signage at entrances and throughout the space** alerting staff and customers to the required occupancy limits, six feet of physical distance, and policy on cloth face covering.
- Encourage customers to **solo shop**.
- **Support physical distance between customer and personnel** by taping off 6 feet distance markers where patrons might interact with volunteers/employees (at cash desks, places where donations are accepted, etc.)
- **Install plexiglass barriers** to maximize physical distancing at the cash desk.
- **Offer exclusive hours** to high-risk individuals.
- **Decide whether to reopen fitting rooms**. If fitting rooms are reopened, retailers should provide hand sanitizer or hand washing stations near fitting rooms. Fitting rooms should be cleaned and disinfected regularly. Any items used by customers in a fitting room and not purchased should be removed from active inventory on the sales floor and stored for 24 hours before return to sales racks.
- **Clean and disinfect high-touch areas routinely**. Carts and baskets should be cleaned and disinfected between each customer use.
- **Consider providing cleaning “kits”** including disinfectant wipes or sprays, disposable gloves, paper towels, cloth face coverings, hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies are readily accessible throughout store, including point of sale terminals and other stations that will be cleaned periodically throughout the day.
- **Promote “contactless” shopping options**:
 - Use Facebook or another online platform to sell or give away items.



- Use contactless payment options (e.g., RFID credit and debit cards, Apple Pay, Google Pay, etc.) OR ask patrons to deposit cash into a cash box and provide them with “clean” change.¹³
- Avoid special events/promotions that could draw large numbers of the public to the business at one time.
- Wash hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) after handling cash.

Safe Spaces

- **Total occupancy of stores is limited to 5 customers per 1,000 square feet** of shopping space. This occupancy limit may need to be lowered for thrift stores, which are often small spaces with narrow aisles that make social distancing challenging.
 - While 5 customers per 1,000 square feet is the maximum number at this time, owners and managers should consider the following factors that can increase transmission risk in their building and may decide to set a lower capacity limit, such as 3 per 1,000 square feet, if present:
 - Poor ventilation, i.e. little outside air circulating in.
 - Confined spaces that make physical distancing difficult.
- **Provide distance markers** located outside of store for times when capacity limits are exceeded; this will allow for queuing while maintaining physical distance; employees can also be assigned to assist customers who are waiting to enter.
- **Maximize air flow** to increase fresh air circulation (e.g. opening windows, or doors).
- **Implement one-way aisles.**
- **Require regular and frequent sanitization** of high-touch areas like restrooms, doors, PIN pads, and common areas that are accessible to staff, customers, and suppliers.
- Ensure operating hours **allow downtime between shifts** for thorough cleaning.

Safe Donations

- Establish procedure for **quarantining donations** (see case studies for sample policies)
 - Research suggests that the virus remains active:
 - On plastic and stainless steel surfaces for two to three days.
 - On cardboard for up to 24 hours.
 - On copper for four hours.

¹³ Julia Bayly, “What Maine’s Farmers Markets Are Doing to Keep Shoppers Safe during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Bangor Daily News*, March 13, 2020, <https://bangordailynews.com/2020/03/13/news/what-maines-farmers-markets-are-doing-to-keep-shoppers-safe-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.



- In aerosols (i.e., suspended air particles) for up to three hours.
- Advise donors that they are **required to wear cloth face coverings** while on the premises.
- **Create donation appointments** to space out contact with patrons.
- Consider asking customers to **sort their own donations** to minimize contact with goods before they are quarantined. Supervise the process to ensure that only acceptable items are donated.
- **Publicize new donation policies** using signage and via Facebook or website.
- **Provide sanitization materials**, such as sanitizing wipes, to employees to clean work tools and equipment before/after use.
- Organizations might also **provide a textile donation kiosk** (like those provided by Apparel Impact) for overflow or unsuitable items.

Benefits of Reopening on a Limited Basis

Reuse organizations will be able to make goods available to people in need, and will continue to provide important social engagement for volunteers, staff, and patrons. These social connections, strongly documented in research, are an important reason why reuse is valuable to people and should not be discounted. Reopening on a limited basis will allow reuse organizations that serve as a funding stream for community non-profits to continue to meet their missions (like stocking food pantries, supplementing school programs, and assisting community members with emergency funds).

Risks of Reopening on a Limited Basis

When patrons, staff, and volunteers interact there is always a chance that the coronavirus will spread. Reopening – even on a limited basis and with precautions taken – may put people at risk. Staffing may be challenging as volunteers – particularly the elderly volunteers who are so important for community thrift stores – stay home to avoid risks.



Contactless Reopening

While patrons, staff, and volunteers all benefit from the social interactions within community reuse organizations, the risks posed by the coronavirus may be too great to allow for a limited reopening. Exploring contactless or low-contact options for reopening can provide patrons with access to goods and can allow staff and volunteers to socialize on a limited basis. Some strategies for contactless reopening include:

1. **Personal shopping** – allow patrons to request a bag of goods with some criteria (clothing sizes and types, for example). Bags could be a set price (like the bag sales often used by thrift stores), and could be set in designated pick-up areas for a contactless exchange. Reuse organizations could be staffed on a limited basis to allow staff and volunteers to stuff bags. This strategy allows reuse organizations to continue to sell/give away goods, and reduces contact between patrons and staff/volunteers.
2. **Shop by appointment** – invite patrons to shop by appointment only. This would allow for limited staff/volunteer and patron interaction. Appointments could be requested via Facebook, email, or phone.
3. **Start-up packs** – reuse organizations might consider putting together “start-up packs” with items that would be helpful for starting out in a new apartment or home. Through partnerships with college campus organizations, immigrant aid organizations, or other non-profits these packs could be sold for a fixed price or given away to individuals.

Benefits of Contactless Reopening

Volunteers, staff, and patrons will have less contact with each other, limiting the potential for the virus to spread from person to person. This strategy may reduce risks while still allowing patrons to access resources. With social distancing, masks, and proper ventilation, volunteers and staff may be able to work in small groups to pack bags or supervise limited patrons, providing some much-valued social interaction. While contactless reopening strategies will limit patron access to reuse organizations, many patrons express an appreciation for the serendipity of finding used objects. They may appreciate the surprise of receiving a handpicked assortment of used goods, especially if prices are low. Creating start-up packs of commonly-sought items like cooking supplies, dishes, or other home goods may help students and families looking to get an affordable start to a new housing situation.

Risks of Contactless Reopening

While the risks of contracting COVID-19 are lower under a contactless reopening strategy, they are not eliminated. Volunteers will still interact with each other, and care must be taken to minimize risks through social distancing, face coverings, and proper ventilation. The other risks of this strategy are that patrons may not be interested in participating, or that they might not hear about these reuse opportunities. These risks can be attenuated by posting in local newspapers and via Facebook or other sites to spread the word.



Case Studies: Thrift Store Policies for Coronavirus Safety

*Goodwill of Northern New England*¹⁴

<p style="text-align: center;">Safe Donations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-serve touchless donations (people sort their own belongings into soft goods, hard goods, glass and breakables). Donations are monitored behind closed doors. Employees cannot assist with donations. • Use sanitizing sprays on bags. • All bags quarantined (3 days for textiles, 5 days for hard surfaces). Anything that can't be sanitized will be sent to warehouse for processing after quarantine is finished. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Safe Spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Door handles, restrooms, pin pads cleaned and sanitized on an ongoing basis. • Plexiglass sneeze guards installed at cashier stations • Informational signs posted throughout the store. • Installed physical distancing floor markers • Traffic arrow flows require one-way movement through aisles.
<p style="text-align: center;">Patron Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limiting number of customers allowed inside the store. • Hand sanitizer provided at entrance to stores. • Carts sanitized between uses. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Employee Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPE (gloves, masks, face shields) provided to employees • Daily temperature checks for employees

¹⁴ Goodwill NNE, “Goodwill’s Response to COVID 19,” August 4, 2020, <https://goodwillnne.org/news/response-to-covid-19/>.



Salvation Army Family Store – Bangor & Newport¹⁵

<p style="text-align: center;">Safe Donations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited donors are allowed to come through at one time to create distance. • Newport store is doing appointment-only donations as their area is much smaller. • Not currently quarantining donations as the most current information is that the virus isn't living long term on surfaces. • Not accepting linens as those tend to be donated without being washed. • Continually monitoring virus information to make the most informed decisions possible. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Safe Spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No public rest rooms or changing rooms. • Stores are continually cleaned throughout the day.
<p style="text-align: center;">Patron Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit customers allowed in the store at one time. • Mandated face masks for all staff and customers. One hour per day is set aside for customers with mask exemptions to shop and during that hour no at-risk staff are scheduled to work. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Employee Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff required to wear gloves. • Staff breaks are staggered so they can be distanced in the break area and have a break from their face masks. • Staff are asked not to come in if they are feeling sick and given the opportunity to make up hours rather than take a sick day, if requested, to help accommodate limited employee sick time. • If staff do not feel comfortable returning to work yet, their positions have been held for them.

¹⁵ Personal Communication, “Salvation Army & COVID-19,” July 13, 2020.



*Serendipity – Bar Harbor, Maine*¹⁶

Serendipity is a volunteer-run thrift store located in Bar Harbor.

<p style="text-align: center;">Safe Donations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited donation hours (open three days per week but accepting donations only on one of those days) • Donations are piled in a corner of the store and are only touched by the donor (some volunteers/staff rearrange with caution – gloves, face masks, and handwashing after contact) • Donations are generally left for a few days before being sorted. • Donations are only sorted by one store manager. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Safe Spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized “pop-up” sales located outdoors under tents (three hours per day, three days per week)
<p>Volunteer & Patron Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All volunteers and customers must wear masks at the pop-up sales. • Volunteers working within the store must wear masks if they are in the same room as another volunteer unless they are distancing in the same group (i.e. family, housemates etc.). • Most of the pre-COVID volunteers are seniors and uncomfortable volunteering at the moment, so hours have been reduced to 3 days per week and the store has recruited some new volunteers. 	

¹⁶ Personal Communication, “Serendipity & COVID-19,” July 30, 2020.



*Yard Sale Guidance - Bangor*¹⁷

The Bangor Daily News interviewed municipal officials and public health experts to design recommendations for safe yard sales during the pandemic.

<p style="text-align: center;">Safe Objects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure your items are cleaned (and disinfected, if recommended and possible) following CDC guidelines before the customers arrive.¹⁸ 	<p style="text-align: center;">Safe Spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post signs to remind visitors of safety protocols (mask-wearing, physical distancing). • Arrange items in a way that limits the amount of people that touch them. For example, consider displaying items on tables rather than putting them in boxes for customers to rummage through.
<p>Organizer & Patron Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate someone to keep a head count. Limit large crowds. • Consider setting and enforcing “early bird” hours for high-risk individuals. • Think about using touchless payment method like Square (digital card reader) or a contactless cash box.¹⁹ • Have hand sanitizer readily available for customers. • Requesting that customers wear masks. • Organizers and customers alike should wash hands or sanitize their hands after handling any sort of payment method. 	

¹⁷ Sam Schipani, “How to Safely Hold a Yard Sale during the Coronavirus Pandemic,” *Bangor Daily News*, June 6, 2020, <https://bangordailynews.com/2020/06/06/homestead/how-to-safely-hold-a-yard-sale-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>.

¹⁸ CDC, “Cleaning & Disinfecting.”

¹⁹ Bayly, “What Maine’s Farmers Markets Are Doing to Keep Shoppers Safe during the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

Resources

Maine COVID-19 General Guidance: <https://www.maine.gov/decd/checklists/general-guidance>

Maine COVID-19 Retail Reopening Guidance: <https://www.maine.gov/decd/checklists/retail-businesses>

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus>

Maine COVID-19 Checklist Compliance Form:
<https://appengine.egov.com/apps/me/covidpreventionform>

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