

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Feeding the Gulf Coast and Mississippi Public Health Institute Provide Fresh Produce and Dry Goods to Gulf Coast Families Affected by COVID-19 Pandemic.

Organizations work together to provide food to individuals and families in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Biloxi, Miss. – On April 4, Feeding the Gulf Coast and The Mississippi Public Health Institute (MSPHI) distributed fresh produce and dry goods to individuals and families at First Baptist Church of Biloxi. The COVID-19 pandemic is creating an added strain on Gulf Coast families struggling with food insecurity and access to healthy foods. Five hundred families received a mixture of fresh produce and dry goods thanks to donations provided by AT&T, the Walmart Foundation, and United Way of South Mississippi. Rouses Markets donated bags so that the food could be pre-packed and ready for distribution. The distribution operated in a drive-through style to minimize contact for both clients and workers. While the distribution was originally planned to feed 100 families prior to the COVID-19 impact, the organizations worked to increase the number of families they were able to serve and the types of food they supplied in light of the significant economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the state.

“Our service area is experiencing an influx of need from those impacted by COVID-19,” said Dan Emery, newly appointed president and CEO for Feeding the Gulf Coast. “School closures and local job layoffs are leading to an unprecedented need for those who typically may not experience food insecurity. While those that struggle on a daily basis are now in an even more critical situation, compounded by the economic stress the COVID-19 virus has created in our communities.”

One in six Mississippians along the Gulf Coast struggles with hunger, and Mississippi has had the highest rate of food insecurity in the country for eight consecutive years, according to data from Feeding America, the nation’s largest domestic hunger-relief organization. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused some very particular economic disruptions for families of the Gulf Coast, which may increase the level of food insecurity in communities for months to come.

“Ensuring Gulf Coast families have access to fresh and healthy foods is a critical part of improving overall health in these communities, and that’s why we have partnered closely with Feeding the Gulf Coast on this effort,” said Tennille Collins, program manager at MSPHI. The food distribution is part of collaborative, multi-faceted efforts to support the development of stronger, healthier families across the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

As families are faced with an increased need for food due to school closures, inability to work, or facing self-quarantine requirements, the "Find Help" feature available at www.feedingthegulfcoast.org, is the best source of information for families and individuals seeking assistance. Individuals can also call (888) 704-FOOD. During this time of uncertainty and crisis, Feeding the Gulf Coast remains dedicated to serving the community. Working with community partners, the food bank will continue to be an organization of hope and support for families facing hunger.

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About Feeding the Gulf Coast

Feeding the Gulf Coast, formerly Bay Area Food Bank, serves a 24-county area spanning the Florida panhandle, south Alabama, and south Mississippi. In 2019, the food bank distributed over 24 million meals to over 400 church pantries, soup kitchens, and other nonprofit organizations throughout its service area. The food bank also operates multiple hunger-relief and nutrition programs, including Summer Meals, Afterschool Meal, Backpack, Disaster Relief, Mobile Pantry and Produce Drop Distributions and Nutrition Education. Feeding the Gulf Coast is a United Way member agency and a member of Feeding America. For more information, visit www.feedingthegulfcoast.org.

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About the Mississippi Public Health Institute

MSPHI is a nonprofit entity established in 2011 to protect and improve the health and well-being of Mississippians, serving as a partner and convener to promote health, improve outcomes, and encourage innovations in health systems. We cultivate partnerships aimed at program innovation, health resources, education, applied research, and policy development.

MSPHI is specifically working with several partners in Jackson, Hancock, and Harrison Counties, including Coastal Family Health Center and the Mississippi State University Gulf Coast Community Design Studio, to promote health and wellness among African American mothers, babies, and families, including a public education campaign called SHEA (Sharing Health Education & Awareness).

MSPHI and its partners are also working with community organizations to increase the rate of breastfeeding among mothers in Gulf Coast communities, especially among African American mothers. “Breastmilk has all of the nutrients babies need for healthy growth and development,” said Collins. “However, we know many mothers have anxiety and stress that make it more challenging to breastfeed. We hope we can alleviate some of that anxiety and stress through this event, enabling mothers to concentrate on the health and well-being of their families and themselves.”

For more information on the SHEA campaign and tips on breastfeeding, tobacco cessation, and active living, visit www.sheahealth.org or contact Tennille Collins at tcollins@msphi.org.