

# COVID-19 Community Innovation Stories, Week of April 20, 2020

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In the face of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the country is seeing innovations in communities that highlight the best of American ingenuity. We highlight these stories to show how many people are helping those around them and prompt everyone to think about how they can help others.<sup>1</sup>

## Tech Platforms

Internet platform companies are joining forces to combat fraud and misinformation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 16, 2020, they issued a statement on efforts to combat misinformation, elevate authoritative content on platforms, and share critical updates in coordination with government healthcare agencies globally.<sup>2</sup>

## Running Health Information Public Service Announcements

A popular web search engine is adding new advertisers, including government entities, hospitals, medical providers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to run health information public service announcements related to COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

## Providing Free Ad Space

An online video-sharing platform introduced informational panels from the World Health Organization (WHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and national health organizations which appear when you search for “coronavirus” and provide topical context and third-party information about the topic. The company is also providing governments and NGOs with free ad space.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This document contains references and links to non-federal resources and organizations. This information is meant solely for informational purposes and is not intended to be an endorsement of any non-federal entity by FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or the U.S. government.

<sup>2</sup> <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/04/coronavirus/#joint-statement>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/02/google-relaxes-its-broad-ban-on-ads-that-mention-coronavirus.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/how-social-media-platforms-are-responding-to-the-coronavirus-infodemic/>



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## Creating Automated Responses to Frequently Asked Questions

As of March 23, 2020, a social media company has been connecting government health organizations and United Nations (UN) health agencies with developer partners to create an automated response to commonly asked questions via a messaging service.<sup>5</sup>

## U.S. Pharmacies Authorized to Administer COVID-19 Test

U.S. pharmacists can now test for COVID-19<sup>6</sup>, providing a needed alternative to hospital emergency rooms. Pharmacists are now authorized to order and administer COVID-19 tests, increasing the population of local healthcare testing providers. Under new authorization by the Department of Health and Human Services, pharmacists can now offer drive-up testing and evaluation services as well as comprehensive medication<sup>7</sup> management when following up with patients with chronic diseases who have contracted COVID-19. A previously untapped resource, there are 67,000 community pharmacies<sup>8</sup> across the country, and roughly 90% of the U.S. population lives within 5 miles of a pharmacy<sup>9</sup>.

With the proper precautions, pharmacists can offer drive-up testing, including supervised self-testing, and evaluation services that allow patients to remain in their car. They may also provide selective home visits for those who are quarantined or self-isolated and refer patients for further medical care when needed.<sup>10</sup>

## Local Food Truck Provides Meals at Truck Stops

Owners of a local food truck in Grand Rapids, Colorado, took it upon themselves to help semi-truck drivers delivering vital supplies across the nation. With statewide stay-at-home orders in place, truck drivers are left with minimal options to access food or restrooms. To help support these critical members of the supply chain, the food truck served barbecue meals – available to truckers only – to ensure they had access to dinner while maintaining social distancing.<sup>11</sup>

## Automation to Reduce Essential Worker Exposure

As cities begin to suspend recycling services to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 among workers who sort through recyclables in close proximity and without adequate protective gear, there has been an increased use of robots that use artificial intelligence to fulfill this task. This involves identifying items on a conveyor and sorting them based on material composition. Similarly, grocery stores are relying on automation to relieve the burden on

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/04/08/hhs-statements-on-authorizing-licensed-pharmacists-to-order-and-administer-covid-19-tests.html>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.pcpcc.org/sites/default/files/media/medmanagement.pdf?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.pcpcc.org/sites/default/files/media/medmanagement.pdf?mod=article_inline)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28813473>

<sup>9</sup> <https://drugstorenews.com/pharmacy/numbers-how-community-pharmacists-measure>

<sup>10</sup> <https://theconversation.com/us-pharmacists-can-now-test-for-coronavirus-they-could-do-more-if-government-allowed-it-135188>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/50-states/2020/04/14/lonely-zoo-animals-drive-salutes-food-truck-helpers-news-around-states/111546794/>

overworked employees by using robots to clean floors and to scan shelves to take inventory. Some stores are also using self-driving ground robots to deliver to customers in the area.<sup>12, 13</sup>

## Drones for Distribution, and Decontamination

Prior to the current pandemic, organizations in the United States and Dominican Republic had already used drones to deliver medical supplies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, China has used drones to optimize food delivery times and safely transport medical samples from hospitals to the country's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In Spain, officials have used agricultural drones to nebulize common areas or large vehicles with the minimal use of human resources.<sup>14</sup>

## Establishing Centrally Located Sites to Deliver COVID-19 Assistance

Cities across the country are setting up centrally located sites to provide a one-stop shop for COVID-related information and key resources such as masks, hand sanitizer, and food items. Palace Station in Las Vegas, Nevada, is coordinating a weekly drive-through distribution center to provide hygiene kits, educational materials, and food items.<sup>15</sup> FIND Food Bank in Palm Springs, California, is setting up temporary mobile markets to distribute perishable and non-perishable free food to qualifying families and individuals.<sup>16</sup>

## FEMA's Best Practice Initiative

Nationwide, there are extraordinary efforts nationwide to support personnel and resource needs to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. FEMA is working to highlight these efforts and encourage everyone to think about what they can do to be a part of providing solutions to help. Visit <https://www.fema.gov/coronavirus/best-practices> for more information.

Topics for the "Best Practices" series are generated from crowd-sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to [fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov).

For more information on how to help during COVID-19, visit FEMA's website for information on donations and volunteering.

FEMA does not endorse any non-government entities, organizations, or services. Claims made by third parties have not been independently verified by FEMA.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/10/business/coronavirus-workplace-automation.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://ktla.com/news/grocery-stores-nationwide-deploying-robots-to-reduce-pressure-on-workers-during-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bbva.com/en/drones-to-stop-the-covid-19-epidemic/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://news3lv.com/news/local/thousands-of-hygiene-kits-emergency-food-supplies-distributed-at-palace-station>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.findfoodbank.org/find-food/food-distributions/?filter=all&submit=Filter>