

# Best Practices Guide for Donations

## Personal Care Products and Food Items



Best-practices to follow to ensure donated items are safe and healthy for your community

## PERSONAL CARE, MENSTRUAL CARE PRODUCTS

### AVOID FRAGRANCED PRODUCTS

No matter if you are donating a lotion, cleaner, laundry detergent, or tampons — avoid fragranced products. Harmful reactions to fragrance ingredients are common and widespread; studies show nearly 35% of the population report acute reactions such as migraines, asthma attacks or rashes when exposed to fragrance. Warning: “Unscented” does not always mean fragrance-free.

### AVOID PRODUCTS THAT HIDE INGREDIENTS

There is no federal law in the U.S. that requires cleaning products companies to disclose their ingredients. In addition, there is no federal law that requires any company - whether they make cleaning or personal care products - to disclose what chemicals are used to make scents that go into their products. But, some companies now choose to voluntarily disclose ingredients. Read labels; buy brands that are transparent about their ingredients.

### ADDITIONAL TIPS INCLUDE:

**Menstrual Care Products:** Avoid scented products and those that do not fully disclose their ingredients. Choose chlorine-free bleach or unbleached tampons and pads, or consider donating more sustainable options like a menstrual cup or period underwear.

**Wipes:** Intimate wipes or baby wipes are often requested items, especially at shelters. Avoid products with fragrance or dyes, or the most problematic preservatives, like allergens Methylisothiazolinone and Methylchloroisothiazolinone (MI & CMI).

**Deodorants, Toothpaste, Dental Floss, Lip Balm, Shampoo, Soap, Sunscreen etc:** Avoid dyes and read labels to avoid chemicals like parabens, sodium laureth sulfate, oxybenzone, and PTFE or fluoro which are PFAs ingredients. Check the Skin Deep database at [www.cosmeticsdatabase.com](http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com) to find safer products.

**Dryer Sheets:** Don't donate dryer sheets. Dryer sheets fill the air with unknown fragrance chemicals, VOCs (volatile organic compounds) linked to respiratory irritation; quats, linked to asthma; and acetone which can cause nervous system effects like headache or dizziness.

**Disinfecting Wipes & Sprays:** Avoid disinfectants that contain active ingredients like chlorine bleach or ammonium quaternary compounds “quats” – linked to health concerns ranging from chemical burns to reproductive harm. Look for disinfectants with safer, effective active ingredients like alcohol/ethanol/isopropanol, hydrogen peroxide, lactic acid, citric acid or thymol.

For safer alternatives see this resource from SF Department of Environment: <https://www.sfapproved.org/safer-covid-19-cleaning-products-and-disinfectants>

## FOOD ITEMS When it comes to food items, avoid donating the following:

- ❑ **Foods that need refrigeration or that easily spoil.** Stick to non-perishable items.
- ❑ **Expired food.** Some expired food can be donated; check with your local food bank on their expiration policies.
- ❑ **Damaged, dented, rusted, ripped** cans, jars or boxes of food — or any food that has already been opened.
- ❑ **Candy or soda or alcohol.**

- ❑ **Home-baked foods or leftovers.** Food banks need to be able to verify ingredients and food preparation processes.
- ❑ **Avoid BPA, if possible.** BPA & BPS exposure is linked to a host of hormone-related health impacts such as increased risk of cancer & obesity. These chemicals are often found in canned items. Consider alternative packaging like cardboard brick-shaped cartons or - if your donation center accepts them - glass or ceramic containers.

For resources & references visit: [www.womensvoices.org/donationguide](http://www.womensvoices.org/donationguide)