

COVID-19 Guidelines for Grocery and Other Food Stores Providing Essential Services

Steps made by individuals and businesses can reduce the spread of COVID-19. Consult your [local health department](#) for requirements specific to your business.

Monitor symptoms in employees

A key way to prevent the spread of illness at a facility is ensuring sick employees stay home. The following are guidelines for when employees should stay home and for how long.

- Employees [who at greater risk for serious complications](#) from COVID-19 should not be required to work or should be allowed to work where exposure to other staff and customers is limited.
- Ask employees to monitor themselves for COVID-19 symptoms and to contact their supervisor immediately if they recently began experiencing any of the following:
 - A fever (100.4°F or higher)
 - Coughing
 - Shortness of breath
 - Sore throat
 - Muscle aches
- Employees with COVID-19 symptoms should:
 - Self-isolate at home.
 - Visit the Department of Health website to learn next steps:
 - [Testing for COVID-19](#)
 - [What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with confirmed COVID-19](#)
 - [What to do if you have symptoms of COVID-19 and have not been around anyone diagnosed with COVID-19](#)
 - Contact their health provider by phone.
- People with a cold or other mild respiratory illness not thought to be COVID-19 should stay home for at least 24 hours since fever ended AND respiratory symptoms are clearly improved.
- If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, they should stay in isolation and not return to work:
 - At least 3 days (72 hours) after fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medications and respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) are gone; AND,
 - At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
- Allow employees to take sick leave if they need stay home to protect themselves and others.

Communicate with customers

- Post signs at entrances telling customers the symptoms of COVID-19 and reminding them to not enter if they have any of the symptoms. (See [CDC's COVID-19 Print Resources](#) for signage.)
- Post signs telling customers about social distancing within the store, about using hand sanitizer (if available), and what you are doing to keep them safe—such as cleaning and sanitizing.
- Post special shopping hours for people at higher risk for severe COVID-19, if relevant.

Practice social distancing

Social distancing practices are an effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19. Use the following strategies to increase social distancing in your establishment:

- Arrange the flow of customers to reduce crowding as much as possible.
- Provide education to your customers about social distancing for non-family members.
- Ensure customers are maintaining social distancing recommendations of staying 6 feet apart by providing signage or spacing markers on the floor.
- Monitor traffic flow and apply these social distancing recommendations to any lines that form inside or outside of the store.
- Encourage customers to shop at less popular times to help prevent congestion.
- Limit the number of shoppers in the store when the occupancy exceeds social distancing guidelines.
- Ensure these strategies are used in all areas of the store, including check stands and self-checkout stands.

Use personal protective equipment

Gloves may be rationed for the medical community or otherwise in short supply. Review your procedures to see what you can change to reduce hand contact throughout the day.

- Ensure gloves are used only when needed for food safety. Tasks such as bagging groceries and stocking store shelves do not need gloves.
- Provide alcohol-based hand antiseptic rubs (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol) for cashiers.
- Ensure all employees wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Recent information indicates people with COVID-19 may not have any symptoms, and even those who do have symptoms can transmit the infection before showing signs of illness.

- It is recommended people wear cloth face coverings when they are in public settings where they cannot maintain 6 feet of distance from others.
 - This recommendation provides an additional layer of protection.
 - Cloth face coverings may be made from household items or common materials.
 - It is not recommended that the general public use surgical masks or N-95 respirators, as those are in high demand for health care providers.
- Where possible, allow your staff to wear cloth face coverings. If possible, provide them with this protection.

Adjust service

- Prohibit on-site dining.
 - Remove or stack tables and chairs in customer seating areas to discourage customer use
- Discontinue product sampling.
- Speed service and reduce handling of unwrapped foods by pre-bagging or portioning.
- Close self-service food counters such as salad bars and hot food bars.
 - For individual foods such as salads or baked goods, wrap or put in individual containers.
- If you continue to offer self-service bulk foods:
 - Disinfect dispensing handles hourly or provide sanitizing wipes for customers to wipe down touch points after each use.
 - Add signage where bulk foods are offered reminding customers of proper hand hygiene.
 - Provide alcohol-based hand rubs (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol) for customers.

Clean and sanitize

- Determine touchpoints frequently used by customers and staff. Increase cleaning and disinfection based on frequency of use.
 - High touch areas such as payment touchpads, handles for freezers/refrigerators, bulk food dispensers, and shopping carts will need more frequent disinfection.
- Provide sanitization materials and training to employees.
- Appoint a designated supervisor per shift to ensure that the cleaning and sanitization plan of the store is carried and meets the [environmental cleaning guidelines set by the CDC](#).

Store clerk safety

Touching reusable shopping bags is a very unlikely way for store clerks to get infected with COVID-19. To help address any concerns, follow these recommendations:

- Encourage self-bagging when customers use reusable shopping bags brought from home.
- Provide single use bags for clerks to use while bagging customer groceries.
- Provide alcohol-based hand antiseptic rubs (with at least 60% ethyl alcohol) for cashiers.
- Ensure all employees wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Remind employees to avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth to help slow the spread of germs.

Produce safety

COVID-19 is not known to spread through food, including fruits or vegetables. Pre-bagging or portioning can reduce customer shopping time. Always wash hands thoroughly before and during food handling.

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

The risk of COVID-19 is not connected to race, ethnicity or nationality. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [Business Signage Toolkit](#)
- [King County Guidance for Grocery Stores to Minimize the Spread of COVID-19](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 Signage and Posters](#)
- [Dining Area Closures: Guidance for Food Establishments \(PDF\)](#)
- [FDA Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [DOH Food Worker and Establishment Guidance on COVID-19](#)
- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

Have more questions about COVID-19? Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127**. For interpreter services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.