

COVID-19: Guidance for the General Public when Shopping for Essential Food and Retail Services

April 4, 2020

Essential services have altered the way they do business to minimize the risks and to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. In order to assist in this process, it is important for the general public to adjust their day-to-day practices to support the efforts undertaken in the community.

This document provides guidance to supports these efforts:

- A limited number of customers are permitted inside grocery /retail food outlets to ensure that a safe 2 m or 6 ft physical distance can be adhered to.
- This physical distance applies to staff members as well. If you must approach someone for assistance, please respect the physical distancing mandate.
- Shopping with family or other household members puts staff and community members at an increased and unnecessary risk. Whenever possible, **shopping should be limited to one person per household**. *Shopping is not an opportunity for a family outing. Please refrain from socializing with others and congesting aisles.*
- It is recommended that staff wash hands with soap and water, or a hand sanitizer between clients. The use of gloves can provide a false sense of security and increase the risk of infection if not used properly e.g. If gloves have been contaminated while serving one client there is a risk of transferring contaminants to the next client if wearing the same gloves. It is recommended that employers provide training on the use of personal protection equipment.
- **PLEASE** take a moment to read the signage that is posted in stores and familiarize yourself with any changes or policies that have been implemented.
- Touch only the items you intend to buy.
- Some facilities have directional arrows in aisles and physical distancing tape as a visual reference. These are put in place to minimize opportunity for transmission and should be followed. This may be enforced with verbal reminders from staff as needed.
- Some stores are not allowing re-usable shopping bags during the outbreak and may be cleaning the grocery belts in between customers. Please be patient and understanding with changes and extended wait times. All measures taken are to protect the public.
- We encourage the use of tap or credit card payments as opposed to cash.
- Customers who feel unwell, have cold, Influenza or **COVID-19 like symptoms (fever, cough,)**, should not enter the store and should **STAY HOME**, self isolate and call 811 for advice. Consider a home delivery service if provided.

- Some stores offer a designated time for elderly people, customers with disabilities who require assistance or customers with compromised immune systems to shop, prior to the general public. This time should be respected and limited to those shoppers.
- Grocery stores do **NOT** have a food or paper product shortage. Stock-piling is not necessary and actually prevents low-income families, and other vulnerable populations from accessing products when needed. Please buy only what you need.
- Some households may be buying perishable foods in larger quantities to limit the number of grocery visits. Keeping your refrigerator at or below 4 °C (40°F) will help ensure the safety of your food and will slow down the rate of bacterial growth, thereby extending the life of your perishables. The recommended freezer temperature is -18°C (0°F) or below.

It is not clear how much of a role produce and food packaging plays in transmitting the virus that causes COVID-19. Research is still ongoing to determine about the virus and how long it can last on surfaces. If you are concerned about potential contamination on your groceries, you can take additional steps to protect yourself:

- Some people may want to wipe down cans with an approved disinfectant and throw away disposable packaging.
- Fruit and vegetables should be washed thoroughly. (If you intend to use a mild detergent, ensure it is completely and thoroughly rinsed)
- When you are done unpacking groceries, wash any tables, countertops or other surfaces that were touched by grocery bags.
- Cloth bags can be laundered and reusable plastic bags can also be wiped down.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after completing these steps.