COVID-19 Guidance for Food Stores

The following guidance is to support owners and operators of food stores, including grocery stores, supermarkets and pharmacies, to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Owners and operators are responsible for ensuring that their food store is in compliance with these public health guidelines, and all emergency orders made under the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020. As every food store will be different, it is the responsibility of owners/operators to review their own policies, procedures, and site-specific operations, while ensuring that the appropriate infection prevention and control measures are implemented and maintained. Food premises must also comply at all times with O. Reg. 493/17: Food Premises made under the Health Protection and Promotion Act. More information about COVID-19 can be found in the Toronto Public Health (TPH) COVID-19 Fact Sheet

The aim and purpose of this document is to assist individuals and businesses with information related to the Ontario Government’s reopening framework as well as Toronto Public Health requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It is important to know that breaches of some of these directions will constitute offences under provincial regulations or other public health legal requirements. While we aim to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional.

Measures for all Workplaces, Businesses and Organizations

Review the Guidance for Employers on Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace to plan and implement protocols to keep staff and customers safe. Operators must also consider the following:

- **Health screening for staff and customers**
  - Actively screen every person that works at the business or organization before they enter the premises of the business or organization. Questions can be completed online, on paper, or asked directly. See sample Staff Screening Questionnaire.
  - Post signs at all entrances to the premises in a conspicuous location visible to the public to inform individuals on how to self-screen themselves for COVID-19 prior to entering the premises.

- **Cleaning and disinfection**
  - Develop enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection policies and procedures.
Clean and disinfect shopping carts and baskets after each use. Have a clearly designated drop off area for used carts and baskets.

- Consider providing disinfecting wipes for customer use to wipe down handles on shopping carts and hand baskets.
- The province has also provided additional COVID-19 guidance for food premises.
- For cleaning and sanitizing food contract surfaces, equipment and utensils, follow standards prescribed in O. Reg. 497/17: Food Premises.

**Managing COVID-19 in the workplace**

- Employers must immediately notify Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 as soon as they become aware of two or more people who test positive for COVID-19 within a 14-day interval in connection with their workplace premises, as per Toronto Public Health Instructions for Workplaces.
- In the event that a case of COVID-19 is reported in a staff member or customer, it is not necessary for the store to discard any food that they may have been in contact with.

### Use of Masks and Face Coverings

- All staff and customers must wear a mask or face covering indoors, as per City of Toronto bylaw and O. Reg. 82/20.
- Some exceptions apply, including children under the age of two, and people with medical conditions that make wearing a mask difficult.

- Operators are required to develop a policy on the wearing of masks or face coverings. Use the Mask By-law Checklist & Sample Policy.
- Masks or face coverings are strongly recommended outdoors when physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- See Guidance for Employers on Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace for more information.

### Safety Plan

- Operators must prepare a safety plan, which:
  - Describes measures/procedures that have been or will be implemented in the business, place, facility or establishment to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
  - Includes measures for screening, physical distancing, masks, cleaning, disinfecting and PPE.
  - Is in writing and made available to any person for review, on request.
  - Is posted in a visible place to come to the attention of those working or attending the location.
- Use the COVID-19 Safety Plan Checklist to develop your safety plan.
Staff Training

- Staff should receive clear instructions on the new mask policy, and understand who is exempted from wearing a mask. Proof of exemption by customers is not required.
- Educate staff on the proper use of masks/face coverings. They should change masks when moist or dirty, but in areas away from customers (e.g. lunch room, private office).
- More information on the use of non-medical masks or face coverings can be found [here](#).
- Discourage staff from gathering together in the lunchroom or common areas.
- Educate staff on hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette:
  - Wash hands frequently with liquid soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds, or use hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) if water and soap is not available.
  - Cover cough or sneeze with the elbow or a tissue. Immediately throw the tissue in the garbage and wash hands.
- Educate staff on the proper use of gloves. If staff use gloves, it is important to change them every hour, or more often, as necessary.
  - Hands should be washed and/or sanitized between changes.
  - Remove gloves when changing tasks.
  - When gloves are removed, new gloves must be used each time.
- Encourage staff to download the COVID Alert app so they can be notified directly if they have been in close contact with someone who was contagious with COVID-19.

Discount and Big Box Stores that Sell Groceries to the Public

- In-store shopping can be available for grocery items, pet care supplies, household cleaning supplies, pharmaceutical items, health care items, school supplies, household safety supplies and personal care items.
- No other goods or services may be sold to the public unless the discount or big box retailer complies with any conditions that are applicable with respect to the sale of those goods or services by other retail establishments under O. Reg. 82/20.
- See Guidance for Retail Settings for more information.

Capacity Limits

- Operators shall limit the number of people in the place of business or facility so that:
  - members of the public are able to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person; and
the total number of members of the public in the business or facility at any one time does not exceed **25 per cent capacity** for supermarkets, grocery stores, convenience stores, indoor and outdoor farmers’ markets, discount and big box stores, other stores that primarily sell food, and pharmacies.

- This can be determined by taking the total square metres of floor space accessible to the public, not including shelving and store fixtures, dividing that number by 16 and rounding the result down to the nearest whole number.
- Discount and big box stores must calculate capacity limits based on the floor area accessible to the public in which the products permitted for in-store shopping are normally displayed for sale.

- Operators must post a sign in a location visible to the public that states the maximum capacity they are permitted to operate under.

**Entrances**

- Position an employee at the entrance to control customer entry.
- Stagger customer entry into the store to prevent crowding.
- Monitor the number of customers entering and leaving the store.
- Once the capacity limit is reached, allow one customer in for every customer that leaves.
- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) available for use by the entrance.

**Managing Lines**

- Operators must ensure that customers lining up or congregating outside their establishment:
  - Maintain at least two metres physical distancing from other groups of people, and
  - Wear a mask or face covering, unless entitled to an exemption.
- Use visual markers, stickers or pylons to encourage physical distancing while waiting outside.

**Physical Distancing**

- Remind customers and staff to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from those outside their household.
- Post physical distancing signs at all entrances, service counters, and cashiers.
- Place markers or circles on the ground so customers know where to stand when waiting or interacting with staff.
- Design a shopping flow for the whole store (e.g. creating one-directional aisles with prominent signage and/or floor markings), where appropriate.
• Install plexiglass/barriers, if possible, where there will be close contact between staff and customers, at service counters and cashiers.
• Set-up portable barriers around employees when restocking (e.g. produce carts).
• Consider assigning an employee to direct customers to the cashier as they become available.
• Stagger the number of cashier stations, including at self-serve stations, open at any given time (e.g. every other station is used), where possible.

**Purchases**

• Provide clean carry-out bags for purchased food and grocery products.
• Customers that bring their own reusable bags or boxes should package their own purchases.
• Encourage electronic payment by debit or credit card, and touchless payment, instead of pin pad use, where possible.
• Limit the handling of credit cards and loyalty cards, wherever possible.
• Consider using one cashier for cash payments.
• Avoid using grocery dividers on conveyor belts at cashier stations, where possible. Consider single use disposable dividers or direct customers to leave a space.
• Update return policies to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. This may include:
  o Eliminating the opportunity to return purchased goods (i.e. final sale only).
  o Cleaning and disinfecting hard-surfaced goods prior to placing them back onto the sales floor.
  o Storing soft-surface items (e.g. cloth) for a period of 3 - 7 days prior to resale.

**Self-Service of Food or Beverage**

• Buffet-style or self-service of ready-to-eat and/or unpackaged bulk food are not permitted.
• Self-serve beverages (e.g. soda, coffee) are also not permitted.
• Staff may serve customers cafeteria style for take-away consumption, provided all public health measures outlined in this document are adhered to (e.g. physical distancing, one-way flow, and plexiglass barriers).
• Pre-package bulk food items, where possible.
• Gravity feed bins may be used but should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.
• Food sampling must be served in a prepackaged format, for take-home consumption.

**Music/Noise**

• Music played in the facility cannot exceed the decibel level at which normal conversation is possible.
Vulnerable Populations

- Support vulnerable populations (e.g. seniors, people with underlying medical conditions) with access to dedicated store hours. Choose times at the start of the day, when the store is freshly cleaned for this shopping.
- Consider offering online or telephone food and grocery orders with contactless delivery or curb side pickup services as alternatives to shopping in person.

Communication

- Provide information to customers about store operations (e.g. public health measures, advance order options, curbside pickup).
- Designate a contact person (e.g. supervisor) to respond to COVID-19 concerns from staff and customers.
- Print and post signs in highly visible areas, including at entrances, service counters, cashiers, and washrooms as a reminder for everyone to practice public health measures:
  - COVID-19: Posters & Graphics
  - COVID-19 Fact Sheet

Other Resources

COVID-19 Guidance for Employers on Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace
COVID-19 Guidance for Employers on Managing COVID-19 in the Workplace
COVID-19 Guidance for Farmers’, Fresh Food & Holiday Markets
COVID-19 Guidance for Restaurants, Bars and other Food Service Premises
COVID-19 Guidance for Retail Settings

More Information

For more information, visit our website at toronto.ca/COVID19 or call us at 416-338-7600.

References
