

## COVID-19 Guidance for Food Stores

The following interim 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.

More information about COVID-19 can be found in the Toronto Public Health (TPH) [COVID-19 Fact Sheet](#).

### Mandatory Mask or Face Covering Bylaw

Effective July 7, 2020, the use of non-medical masks or face coverings is required in all indoor public spaces, as per a new City of Toronto [bylaw](#). Operators are required to develop a policy and protocols on the wearing of masks. Refer to the [guidance on mask and face covering bylaw](#) for a sample policy that your organization can adapt. More information is available [here](#).

### Staff Health Screening and Attendance

- Inform staff about the changes being made to protect them against COVID-19 by posting signs, and updating information on the website or by email.
- Ensure all staff complete a [health screening questionnaire](#) before each shift. The questions can be completed online, on paper or by asking your staff directly.
- Adjust work hours and shifts to reduce the number of staff in your facility at any one time.
- Have a flexible sick policy so staff do not come to work ill.
- Remind staff about the importance of reporting illness to their supervisor/manager.
- If staff become ill with [symptoms of COVID-19](#) while at work, they should go home right away and [self-isolate](#). Instruct staff to call Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000, a health care provider, or an [Assessment Centre](#) to get tested.
- Staff should report to their Occupational Health and Safety Department prior to returning to work.
- In general, staff can return to work 14 days after their symptoms began if they had COVID-19.
- There are no clearance tests required for staff to return to work.
- For other illnesses, or if a staff has tested negative for COVID-19, they should not attend work until they are symptom-free for at least 24 hours.

### 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.

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- 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 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.

## Entrances

- Set a capacity limit for the number of customers allowed in the store at any given time.
- The capacity limit should be based on available retail floor space, to ensure ease of movement while maintaining a physical distance of two metres (six feet) from others. Consider one person for every two metres square (four squared metres) of floor space.
- Post signage at the entrance stating of the maximum number of customers permitted at any one time.
- 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.

## COVID-19 Screening

- Post [signs](#) at store entrances explaining the conditions for entry.
- Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19, who has been in contact with a person with COVID-19, or has traveled outside of Canada in the last 14 days, should not enter the store.
- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) available for use by the entrance.

## Communication

- Inform customers about the changes you have made to protect them against COVID-19, such as using posters, updated websites, email, newsprint, and making announcements at regular intervals on the public announcement (PA) system.

- Designate a contact person (e.g. supervisor) to respond to COVID-19 concerns from staff and customers.

## Signage

- 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:
  - [Mandatory Mask or Face Covering Bylaw](#)
  - [Health Screening](#)
  - [Physical Distancing](#)
  - [Protect Yourself](#)
  - [Information about COVID-19](#)
  - [Wash your Hands](#)
  - [Cover your Cough](#)

## Physical Distancing

- Remind customers and staff to maintain a physical distance of two metres (six feet) as best as possible.
- Use visual markers, stickers or pylons to encourage physical distancing while waiting outside.
- Post [physical distancing signs](#) at all entrances, at service counters and cashiers.
- Place markers or circles 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.
- Consider staggering the number of cashier stations open at any given time (e.g. every other station is used).

## 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:
  - Eliminating the opportunity to return purchased goods (i.e. final sale only).

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- Cleaning and disinfecting hard-surfaced goods prior to placing them back onto the sales floor.
- Storing soft-surface items (e.g. cloth) for a period of 48 hours 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 yet permitted.
- Self-serve beverages (e.g. soda, coffee) are also not yet permitted.
- Staff may serve customers cafeteria style, 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 may resume if served in a prepackaged format, for take-home consumption.

### **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 these purchases.
- Offer online or telephone food and grocery orders with contactless delivery or curb side pickup services as alternatives to shopping in person.

### **COVID-19 Outbreaks and Contact Tracing**

- Keep a staff log of when and where staff worked, with contact information in case it is required for contact tracing by public health.
- Toronto Public Health will use this list to notify and provide instructions for close contacts to self-isolate or self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms.
- 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.
- Additional public health advice in the event of an outbreak may include additional cleaning and disinfecting measures to reduce the risk of spread in the setting.

### **Cleaning and Disinfection**

- Develop enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection policies and procedures.
- Maintain a log to track cleaning and disinfecting activities.
- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting washrooms, as required.
- High traffic areas and frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice per day, and when visibly dirty (e.g. freezer/cooler doors, countertops, hand rails, cashier stations, conveyor belts, debit/credit machines).
- 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.

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- Increase the number of shifts/hours to ensure enough time is spent cleaning and disinfecting.
- Monitor and clean the parking lot daily and as necessary (e.g. for discarded gloves, masks, litter).
- Review Public Health Ontario's [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#) fact sheet.
- Refer to Health Canada's [list of hard-surface disinfectants](#) for information on disinfectants effective against COVID-19.
- For cleaning and sanitizing food contact surfaces, equipment and utensils, follow standards prescribed in [Ontario Food Premises Regulation](#). The [Ontario Ministry of Health](#) has also provided additional COVID-19 guidance for food premises.

## Workplace Health and Safety

- Employers must have written measures and procedures for staff safety, including for infection prevention and control.
- Ontario has general information on [COVID-19 and workplace health and safety](#), where employers can learn about their responsibilities and how to protect workers at work.
- Workers can also get information about [health and safety protections](#) at the workplace.

## Other Resources

[COVID-19 Guidance for Workplaces and Businesses](#)

[COVID-19 Guidelines for Re-Opening your Restaurant, Bar or other Food Premises](#)

## More Information

For more information, visit our website at [toronto.ca/COVID19](https://toronto.ca/COVID19) or call us at 416-338-7600.

## References

BC Centre for Disease Control. (2020). Food Businesses. Retrieved from:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/employers-businesses/food-businesses>

Government of Alberta. (2020). Guidance for Grocery Stores. Retrieved from:

<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-relaunch-guidance-grocery-stores.pdf>