COVID-19 Guidance When Shopping for Essentials

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a novel coronavirus that can result in acute respiratory illness. In general, this virus can spread when a sick person coughs or sneezes. It may also be possible for a person to get COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching their own mouth, nose, or their eyes. The majority of people with COVID-19 develop a mild illness, which may include fever, cough, or shortness of breath. Children may have milder or asymptomatic infections of COVID-19, and the virus may still be transmitted to other people. For more general information about COVID-19, visit www.toronto.ca/COVID19.

Supermarkets, grocery stores and some other retail outlets are essential businesses as they provide safe and reliable access to food and other necessities. The following recommendations can help protect yourself and prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

Stay home if you are sick

• Do not go out when you are sick or if you are self-isolating.
• Limit contact with household members.
• Visit our website to learn what to do if you have symptoms of COVID-19 or have been exposed.

Limit the number of shopping trips

• Order supplies online, if possible.
• Minimize the number of trips for groceries, medication and other essentials, to once a week.
• Keep track of the essentials you already have at home. Try to be creative and use what you have before deciding to go out (e.g. try new recipes).
• Offer to pick-up essentials for neighbours, especially vulnerable community members.
• Plan before going out:
  o Make a list of the items that you need to limit the amount of time spent out during your visit.
  o Buy enough for one to two weeks at a time, buying more than this can create strain on supply chains and result in temporary shortages.
  o Try to do all of your shopping at one location.
  o Check the stores website or call in advance to find out when the best time to visit is (i.e. off-peak hours) and to find out about special hours for seniors and vulnerable individuals.
  o Allow for extra time. Stores may limit the number of people entering at a time, and may have a lineup outside the main entrance.
  o Be patient and treat store employees and other customers with kindness and respect.

Safe shopping practices

• Practice physical distancing:
  o Reduce crowding by not bringing extra people with you when going shopping.
    ▪ Households should designate one person to do the shopping, if possible.
Keep two metres (six feet) apart from others:
- Follow physical distancing markers and visual aids (e.g. signage, floor markings) where provided
- Avoid crowded aisles.
- Be courteous to others in front of you by allowing them to complete their selection of items before moving forward.
- If you have to ask a staff member a question, remember to keep your distance.
- Don’t crowd the cashier station, and keep your distance from the person in front of you.
- Wait until the person in front of you has finished collecting their items before unloading yours at the cashier station.

Greet others from a distance with a nod or wave.

Practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette:
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds.
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, if your hands are not visibly soiled.
  - If possible, carry hand sanitizer and use it before entering and immediately after exiting the store.
- Cover your cough or sneeze into a tissue. Immediately throw the tissue in the garbage and wash your hands. If you don’t have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Use disinfectant wipes:
  - If provided in the store, wipe down the cart or basket handles and discard the wipe immediately.
  - If possible, bring your own disinfectant wipes.

Practice general food safety while shopping:
- Avoid touching items that you are not going to buy.
- Visually inspect fruit, vegetables and other items prior to selection to ensure they are fresh.
- Canned food should be free of dents, rust and bulges.
- Packages should be intact with no ripped or torn packaging.
- Avoid purchasing bulk food items that are not prepackaged (e.g. candy, nuts).
- Use contactless payment whenever possible.
- Never leave food in a hot car as warm temperatures can help bacteria to grow.
- If reusable bags are permitted, bag your own groceries to minimize touching by other individuals.

Clean and disinfect surfaces in your vehicle if you touched them before washing/sanitizing your hands. (e.g. steering wheel, door handles, radio dials).

Gloves
- Gloves are not a substitute for proper hand hygiene, and are not recommended when shopping.
- If you choose to wear gloves, it is important to change/remove them when they become dirty and after exiting the store.
- Avoid touching your face when wearing gloves.
- Discard gloves in a waste receptacle immediately after removing.
- Wash and/or sanitize your hands immediately after removing gloves.
Face masks & coverings
- Face masks and coverings can be used if you are unable to maintain a two metre (six feet) distance from others while shopping.
- Wearing a mask or face covering may not protect you from COVID-19, but it may protect others from your respiratory droplets and germs.
- Children under the age of two, individuals having trouble breathing or anyone unable to remove the mask without assistance should not wear a mask or face covering.
- Visit our [website](#) for more information about how to safely wear and take off a face mask or covering.

Putting away your groceries
- Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after returning home, handling groceries, bags, food packaging/containers and putting away food.
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables, under cold running water.
- Refrigerate or freeze perishable foods promptly.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces after unpacking your groceries (e.g. countertops).
- Clean and wash re-usable grocery bags before every use.

Using food delivery services
- Food should be delivered and received with minimal or no contact.
- Prepay for food with a credit card when you order over the phone, or online.
- Delivery should be contactless:
  - Orders should be delivered to your front door or a designated area.
- Maintain two meters (six feet) when receiving a delivery.
- Check the following upon receiving a food delivery:
  - Food should be delivered to you as quickly as possible to ensure it is received at the proper temperatures: "hot food" should be hot and "cold food" should be cold.
  - Food packing should be intact and sealed to prevent leaking and protect the food during transit.
  - Food packaging should be labelled.
  - Check for signs of freshness (i.e. no spoilage and mould).
  - If in doubt, throw it out, or contact the store you purchased the food from.
- After receiving take-out deliveries, transfer the meal to a plate and discard the packaging immediately.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after handling take-out bags/packaging and before eating.

General food safety practices at home
- Prevent cross contamination:
  - Keep fruits, vegetables and ready to eat foods separate from raw meats.
  - Wash your hands before and after handling or preparing food.
- Cook/reheat food properly to avoid foodborne illness.
- Use a probe thermometer to check that the food is cooked to the proper internal temperature.
  - Cooking and reheating food to recommended internal temperatures for beef, poultry, pork should kill the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Visit our [website](#) to learn more about food safety at home.
Food Access

- Seniors and vulnerable residents who are in self-isolation, feeling ill or need help obtaining food, can call 211 for assistance.
- Visit our website for more information about food access strategies and delivery services.

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

References


