COVID-19 Guidance for Retail Settings

This document contains guidance for retail operators to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It describes the requirements operators must comply with under the Reopening Ontario Act. For related information, please refer to Guidance for Malls and Shopping Centres.

As every retail setting is different, it is ultimately the responsibility of the operator to review their own site-specific circumstances and assess their ability to implement appropriate infection prevention and control measures.

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.

Protective Measures to Keep Everyone Safe

- Get a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Keep a two metre distance from those you don’t live with, when possible.
- Wash your hands often, and avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Wear a face mask or covering when you are in indoor public spaces, and when you cannot maintain a two metre distance outdoors.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

What is Permitted (O. Reg. 364/20)

Businesses that engage in retail sales to the public may open if they comply with the following conditions:
- The person responsible for the establishment must post a sign in a conspicuous location visible to the public that states the capacity limits under which the establishment is permitted to operate.
• Capacity must be limited indoors so that members of the public are able to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person in the establishment.

• If the business permits members of the public to test drive any vehicles, boats or watercraft:
  o the members of the public must be actively screened in accordance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health before they participate in the test drive, and
  o all participants in the test drive must wear a mask or face covering in a manner that covers their mouth, nose and chin, unless they are entitled to an exemption.

• Shopping malls are open for in-person shopping, with restrictions. See COVID-19 Guidance for Malls and Shopping Centres for more information.

Measures for all Workplaces, Organizations & Businesses

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

• Health screening for staff and patrons
  o Staff must be actively screened prior to their work shift.
  o Patrons must self-screen prior to entering the premises.
  o Post signs on the front door explaining the conditions for entry, including screening.

• Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
  o Provide hand sanitizer with 70-90% alcohol concentration in dispensers outside the entrance to the store, particularly near high-touch services such as bank machines, touch-screens, elevators, escalators and stair railings.
  o Encourage everyone to use hand sanitizer when they enter.
  o 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 should be used each time.

• Cleaning and disinfecting
  o Any washrooms, change rooms, or similar amenities made available to the public must be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
  o Any equipment that is rented to, provided to or provided for the use of members of the public must be cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
Clean and disinfect shopping carts and baskets after each use. Those which cannot be easily sanitized should not be provided (e.g. cloth bags). 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.

- Business hours may need to be adjusted to accommodate enhanced cleaning and disinfecting practices.
- Employees should use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as gloves and eye protection if it is anticipated that hands will come into contact with bodily fluids, broken skin, mucous membranes, contaminated equipment or environmental surfaces.
- Discourage use of touch screens for wayfinding.
- If patrons are permitted to handle/sample testers (e.g. beauty products, eye wear, etc.) the products should be set aside, cleaned and disinfected prior to returning them to the self.
- Remove soft/porous items that are difficult to sanitize such as upholstery, cushions and rugs.

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.

Safety Plan

Operators must prepare a safety plan, which:

- Describes measures and procedures that have been or will be implemented in the business to reduce spread of COVID-19.
- Includes measures for screening, physical distancing, masks or face coverings, cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and objects, the wearing of PPE, and preventing and controlling crowding.
- Is in writing and made available to any person for review, on request.
- Is posted in a visible place where it is likely to come to the attention of those working or attending the location.

Use the COVID-19 Safety Plan Checklist to develop your safety plan.

Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC)

- Increase the introduction and circulation of outdoor air by maximizing the outdoor air ratio of the HVAC system settings, or by opening windows and doors, where possible. Avoid recirculating air.
- Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk.
• Ensure the HVAC system(s) are properly maintained.
• Where provided, use the highest efficiency filters that are compatible with the HVAC system.
• Keep areas near HVAC inlets and outlets clear.
  o Seating and activities should be arranged away from areas with high airflow (i.e. not in front of air vents).
• Rooms where indoor ceiling fans are used should have an upward airflow rotation.
• If portable fans are used, limit the blowing of air across people and surfaces by positioning them to provide an upward movement of air.
• For more information, review TPH's COVID-19: Transmission, Aerosols and Ventilation fact sheet.

Facilitate Physical Distancing
• All patrons must maintain at least two metres distancing while shopping and standing in line inside and outside.
• Monitor entrances to control patrons entering the store.
• Rearrange store layout and remove non-essential furniture/items, to allow ease of movement for physical distancing.
• Establish directional aisles to manage patron flow.
• Staff should remind clients to stay at least two metres apart, as much as possible.
• Use every other check out station if physical distancing of at least two metres between patrons cannot be maintained.
• Shipping and deliveries should be completed in a designated area, away from patrons and most staff, if possible.
• Consider patron appointments and coordinate them to allow adequate space to maintain physical distancing between patrons and staff.

Install Transparent Barriers
• Consider installing plexiglass or other impermeable barriers where physical distancing cannot be maintained (e.g. cashier stations).
• To be effective the barrier must be large enough to create a shield between the breathing zones of the people on either side.
• Download more information about installing transparent barriers.

Manage Lines
• Operators must ensure that patrons lining up or congregating outside or inside their establishment maintain at least two metres physical distancing from other groups of persons.
Masks are required while waiting in line indoors, and strongly recommended outdoors.
Post physical distancing signs at all entrances, service desks or otherwise.
Place visual / textural markers (e.g. tape on the floor, pylons, signs) spaced two metres apart for patrons lining up when waiting to enter the store and cash-out.

Use of Masks and Face Coverings
The use of non-medical masks or face coverings is required in all indoor public spaces, as per a City of Toronto bylaw. Operators are required to develop a policy on the wearing of masks. Use the Mask By-law Checklist and Sample Policy.
Appropriate PPE that covers the eyes, nose and mouth must be worn if, while providing service in an indoor area, the person
- is required to come within two metres of another person who is not wearing a mask or face covering; and
- is not separated by plexiglass or some other impermeable barrier from a person described above.

Food and Beverages
Indoor dining is permitted with restrictions.
- Prohibit consumption of food or drink while shopping.
- See COVID-19 Guidance for Restaurants, Bars & Other Food Service Premises for more information.
Food sampling should be served in a prepackaged format, for take-home consumption.
Designate an appropriate space, away from patrons, for employees to consume food and drink. Ensure this area follows all applicable public health measures (e.g., physical distancing, cleaning and disinfecting).

Additional Considerations

Product displays
Consider stocking shelves and arranging product displays when the store is closed to patrons. Where stocking or product display arrangements are needed during operating hours, define safe practices for workers. Consider closing aisles while restocking or using signs to remind patrons to stay at least two metres apart.
Workers should wash their hands before and after stocking/rearranging shelves or product displays.
• Gravity feed bins should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.

Assisting patrons
• Consider stopping, reducing or modifying your patron interaction, demonstration, and assistance practices to reduce contact intensity and number of contacts. Maintain at least two metres distance when providing service face-to-face. Ensure both patron and staff are wearing a mask.
• To minimize physical contact with patrons, offer online or telephone orders with delivery or pick up services as alternatives to shopping in person.

Checkout and returns/exchanges
• Avoid using grocery dividers on conveyor belts at cashier stations, where possible. Consider single use disposable dividers or direct customers to leave a space.
• Patrons who bring their own reusable shopping bags should pack their own bags at checkout.
• Use tap features at checkout instead of cash, where possible.
• 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 Setting aside returned items that cannot be properly cleaned and disinfected (e.g., for 24 to 72 hours) before resale.

Fitting rooms
• Encourage patrons to sanitize their hands before trying on clothes.
• Fitting room stalls should be cleaned and disinfected as often as is necessary to maintain a sanitary condition.
• Remove unnecessary or decorative objects from inside the fitting rooms.
• Avoid issuing number cards to patrons. Consider other options to count or limit the number of items brought into a fitting room.
• Request customers to leave unwanted items in a designated location, including hangers.
• Items that have been tried on should be quarantined in a sanitized bin or space (e.g. for 24 to 72 hours) before returning them to the rack/shelf.

Increase Communication with Patrons
• Provide information to patrons about retail operations (e.g. public health measures, changes to store policies) through different platforms (e.g. website, email, social media).
• Encourage patrons and staff who were born in 2016 or earlier to get vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine. Read and share information about the vaccine and where to get vaccinated.
  o Post signs and share COVID-19 vaccine resources, available in multiple languages.
• Post signs at the entrance instructing patrons and staff not to enter if they are sick.
• Download information and post educational materials to encourage healthy behaviours that reduce the spread of COVID-19:
  o COVID-19: Posters & Graphics
  o COVID-19 Fact Sheet

Other Resources
Guidance for Employers on Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace
Guidance for Employers on Managing COVID-19 in the Workplace
COVID-19 Guidance for Farmers’ & Fresh Food Markets
Province of Ontario Guidance on Health and Safety for Retail Sector during COVID-19
Province of Ontario Retail: Guidance for Health and Safety Tip sheet
Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety COVID-19 Tip Sheets

More Information
For more information visit www.toronto.ca/COVID19 to stay up to date.

Reference