

COVID-19 Guidelines: Grocery and Retail Stores

Date Issued: April 30, 2020

In an effort to help contain the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and protect the public, the Province of Ontario enacted a [declaration of a state of emergency](#) on March 17, 2020 under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*.

On April 3, 2020, the [Government of Ontario](#) extended the declaration until May 12, 2020. This requires the closure of all non-essential workplaces. The updated list of [essential workplaces](#) permits supermarkets, grocery stores, convenience stores, discount and big box stores selling groceries, restaurants (take-out, drive-through and delivery service only) and pharmacies to remain open.

In addition to existing requirements under [Ontario Food Premise Regulation 493](#), Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) is strongly advising further precautions are in place to protect the health and safety of employees and customers during this time. Please also refer to the [Government of Ontario](#) resource providing best practices to help employers and employees prevent the spread of COVID-19 in food services.

Ensure Physical Distancing:

Ensure employees and customers maintain [physical distancing](#) by staying 2 metres (6 feet) away from one another.

- Assign an employee at the entrance to monitor and limit the number of customers entering your location
- Consider providing markers on the sidewalk/area outside of the store for potential overflow line-ups
- Stagger the number of people entering to allow for physical distancing
- Design a shopping flow to allow one-way traffic with arrows on the floor
- Provide signage at the entrance and throughout the premise to remind customers and employees about the importance of physical distancing
- Add floor markings to aisles and checkout lines to delineate physical space
- Place tape with 6ft markers in front of service counters (e.g. meat/deli counters, bakery, customer service, etc.)



- Reduce the lines and grouping at the cash registers by having customers line up behind 6ft tape marking on the floor and have an employee direct customers as a cashier become available
- Ask customers not to stop in front of the cashier but to wait at the end of the conveyor belt
- Consider installing barriers between cashiers and customers
- Provide clean carry out bags, customers should be encouraged not to use their own containers or re-usable bags
- If close contact with colleagues or members of the public is unavoidable, consider wearing a mask. [Tips for how and when a mask should be used are shared](#) by the Government of Ontario.

Calculating the Maximum Number of People in a Store

- A suggestion for calculating a maximum number of persons in a grocery store at one time is one person per 2 meters squared or 4 square meters of retail floor space.^{1,3}

Keep Your Hands Clean:

To reduce the spread of bacteria and viruses, including the flu and COVID-19, ensure the following:

- Food handlers must [wash their hands](#) often and before handling or preparing any food, for at least 20 seconds with soap and water
 - Employees who are serving food to customers, may use an alcohol-based [hand sanitizer](#) if soap and water are not available and their hands are not visibly dirty
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Avoid high-touch areas, where possible, and ensure you wash your hands afterwards
- Cough and sneeze into the bend of your arm
- Consider limiting the handling of credit and debit cards wherever possible, by allowing customers to scan. Always practice proper hand washing when handling cash or credit/debit cards.
 - More information is shared by the [Bank of Canada](#) on the importance of continued acceptance of cash and how to safely handle.
- Employees should wash their hands before and after and breaks, at the beginning and end of their shift, and before preparing or eating food.

Glove Use

Glove use is not required. Gloves are not a substitute for proper hand hygiene, as they do not guarantee that food or surfaces are not contaminated. Gloves should be worn when a food handler has cracked or broken skin or a bandage that is covering a wound. If using gloves, do so properly.

Tips for the Proper Use of Gloves:

- Gloves must be used in combination with handwashing
- Hands should always be washed and/or sanitized with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer prior to putting on gloves and after taking gloves off
- Change gloves whenever you change activities, touch your face, or contact with an item or surface that may be contaminated
- Gloves should be thrown out and not used again once they have been taken off

Implement Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection:

Continue using cleaners and sanitizers on food contact surfaces, as outlined in the [Ontario Food Premise Regulation 493](#), including a chlorine solution of 100 parts per million (can be made by mixing ½ tsp of bleach to 1 litre of water) or a quaternary ammonium product of 200 parts per million.

[Clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched non-food contact surfaces, such as pay stations, bagging areas, door handles, light switches, handrails, phones, counters, etc. at least twice per day. Use only disinfectants that have a [Drug Identification Number \(DIN\)](#) and follow an manufacturer's instructions.

- Consider disinfecting shopping carts and baskets between customers
- Consider providing portable hand washing stations for customers or alcohol-based hand sanitizer at the entrances
- Ensure washrooms are cleaned and sanitized frequently and well supplied with liquid soap, paper towels, hot and cold running water and a garbage receptacle

Consider Vulnerable Populations:

- Some businesses have begun offering the first hour of operation for customers from vulnerable populations, such as individuals over the age of 65 or those with a compromised immune system.

Employees Should Not Work If:

- They are not feeling well or have COVID-19 symptoms
 - Symptomatic employees should be sent home and advised to complete the online [Ontario self-assessment tool](#) or go to a nearby [assessment centre](#) for COVID-19 testing
- They have traveled [outside of Canada](#) within the past 14 days

You must [self-isolate](#) for 14 days before returning to work. If an employee becomes ill, please refer to the [COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses: Employers & Employees](#) resource.

Failure to comply with these requirements may result in fines under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act that range from \$750.00 to \$1000.00 for an individual and up to \$10,000,000 for a corporation.

We understand that this is a challenging time and want to thank you for your dedication and support of others in our community. For more information on COVID-19, please visit our website at <https://wdgpublichealth.ca/>.

Contact Information for Additional Inquiries

Dial 1-800-265-7293 ext. 4020 (open Monday – Friday from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.) for inquiries about:

- Workplace concerns
- Protecting yourself from COVID-19

Or if you have a question or concern about a food establishment:

- Contact a Public Health Inspector by calling 1-800-265-7293 ext. 4753

Additional Resources:

[Ministry of Health – COVID-19 Guidance for Food Premises](#)
[Public Health Agency of Canada: Preventing COVID-19 in the Workplace](#)
[COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses: Employers & Employees](#)
[Restaurant and food services health and safety during COVID-19](#)

References

1. British Columbia Ministry of Health; British Columbia Centre for Disease Control. COVID-19 Guidance to Retail Food and Grocery Stores [Internet].2020. [cited 2020 April 15] Available from: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/embc/covid-materials/covid-19_guidance_to_grocery_stores_29mar2020_final.pdf
2. Eastern Ontario Health Unit. Order of the Medical Officer of Health under Section 22 Health Protection and Promotion Act [Internet].2020. [cited 2020 April 10] Available from: <https://bseo.ca/files/resources/new-order-from-the-medical-officer-of-health-for-essential-businesses-serving-customers.pdf>
3. Government of Saskatchewan. Guidance for Grocery Stores [Internet].2020. [cited 2020 April 15] Available from: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-for-businesses-and-workers/guidance-for-grocery-stores>
4. Ottawa Public Health. COVID-19 Guidance for Retail Stores – Including Grocery Stores and Pharmacies [Internet]. 2020. [cited 2020 April 13] Available from: <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/resourcesGeneral/Guidance-Documents---Retail-Stores.pdf>