



## Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

# What Grocery and Food Retail Workers Need to Know about COVID-19

**Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)** is a respiratory illness caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. [Symptoms](#) often include cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell. Our understanding of how the virus spreads is evolving as we learn more about it, so check the [CDC website](#) for the latest information. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person:

- Between people who are [in close contact with one another \(within about 6 feet\)](#)
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks

Recent studies indicate that the virus can be spread by people who are not showing symptoms. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. This is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads, but we are still learning more about this virus. Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at [higher risk for more serious complications](#) from COVID-19.

### As a grocery or food retail worker, how can I protect myself and slow the spread?

As a grocery or food retail worker, potential sources of exposures include close contact for prolonged periods of time with a customer with COVID-19 and touching your nose, mouth, or eyes after handling items, cash, or merchandise that customers with COVID-19 have touched.

- Notify your supervisor and stay home if having [symptoms](#) (fever, cough, or shortness of breath).
- Follow [CDC-recommended steps](#) if you are sick. You should not return to work until the criteria to [discontinue home isolation](#) are met, in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.
- Follow [CDC recommended precautions](#) and notify your supervisor if you are well but have a sick family member at home with COVID-19.
- Limit close contact with others and maintain a distance of at least 6 feet, when possible.
  - Remind customers to maintain 6 feet distance from workers and other customers with verbal announcements on the loudspeaker and written signage.
- CDC recommends [wearing cloth face coverings](#) in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, especially in areas of significant community-based transmission. Cloth face coverings may prevent people who don't know they have the virus from transmitting it to others. These face coverings are not surgical masks or respirators and are not appropriate substitutes for them in workplaces where masks or respirators are recommended or required.
- Encourage customers to use touchless payment options, when available. Minimize handling cash, credit cards, reward cards, and mobile devices, where possible.
- When exchanging paper and coin money:
  - Do not touch your face afterward.
  - Ask customers to place cash on the counter rather than directly into your hand.
  - Place money directly on the counter when providing change back to customers.
  - Wipe counter between each customer at checkout.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as workstations, cash registers, payment terminals, door handles, tables, and countertops on a routine basis. Follow the directions on the cleaning product's label and clean hands afterwards.
- Practice proper [hand hygiene](#). This is an important infection control measure. With appropriate hand hygiene, gloves are not necessary for workers who are not involved in food preparation. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol can be used. but not as

a substitute for cleaning hands with soap and water.

- Key times to clean hands include:
  - Before, during, and after preparing food
  - Before eating food
  - After using the toilet
  - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
  - After putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings
- Additional workplace-specific times to clean hands include:
  - Before and after work shifts and periodically throughout shift
  - Before and after work breaks
  - After touching money or objects that have been handled by customers, such as reusable grocery bags
  - Before putting on and taking off disposable gloves when performing food prep
- Avoid contact with body fluids.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Use tissues when you cough, sneeze, or touch your face. Throw used tissues in the trash.

## What steps should my employer take?

Grocery and food retail establishment employers should have a COVID-19 health and safety plan to protect employees, following [CDC Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#). This plan should be shared with you and your coworkers. Employers should:

### Reduce transmission among employees

- Take [steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if an employee is sick](#).
  - Actively encourage sick employees to stay home.
  - Sick employees diagnosed with COVID-19 shouldn't return to work until [the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met](#), in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.
  - Provide employees with accurate information about COVID-19, how it spreads, and risk of exposure.
  - Be aware that some employees may be at higher risk for serious illness, such as older adults and those with chronic medical conditions. Implement specific policies to minimize face-to-face contact between these employees or assign work tasks that allow them to maintain a distance of six feet from other workers, customers and visitors, or to telework if possible.
  - Provide training to employees on proper [hand washing](#) practices and other routine preventative measures. This will help prevent the spread of many diseases, including COVID-19.
- Provide employees with access to soap, clean running water, and materials for drying their hands, and provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol at stations around the establishment for use by both workers and customers.

### Maintain a healthy work environment

- Institute measures to physically separate and increase distance between employees, other coworkers, and customers, such as:
  - Configure partitions with a pass-through opening at the bottom of the barrier in checkout lanes, customer service desks, and pharmacy and liquor store counters as a barrier shield, if possible.
  - Use every other check-out lane to aid in distancing.
  - Move the electronic payment terminal/credit card reader farther away from the cashier in order to increase the distance between the customer and the cashier, if possible.
  - Use verbal announcements on the loudspeaker and place signage throughout the establishment, at entrances, in restrooms, and in breakrooms to remind employees and customers to maintain distances of 6 feet from others.
  - Place visual cues such as floor decals, colored tape, or signs to indicate to customers where they should stand during check out.
  - Shift primary stocking activities to off-peak or after hours when possible to reduce contact with customers.

- Remove or rearrange chairs and tables or add visual cue marks in employee break rooms to support social distancing practices between employees. Identify alternative areas such as closed customer seating spaces to accommodate overflow volume.
- Provide remote shopping alternatives for customers, including click-and-collect, delivery, pick-up, and shop-by-phone to limit customers in the establishment. Set up designated pick-up areas.
- Control the flow of traffic into the establishment by ensuring that maximum capacity plans are adjusted and managed at the front door.
- Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and good [hand hygiene](#) at the entrance to the workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
- [Clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces within the establishments. If the surfaces are visibly dirty, clean them prior to disinfecting. To disinfect, use [products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2](#) [↗](#), diluted household bleach solutions prepared according to the manufacturer's label for disinfection, or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and are appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer's directions for use.
  - Clean frequently touched shelving, displays, and reach-in refrigerator units nightly when closed to the public.
  - Conduct frequent cleaning of employee break rooms, rest areas, and other common areas.
  - Clean grocery carts and baskets.
  - Require employees to clean out lockers nightly to facilitate overnight deep cleaning processes.
- Provide disposable disinfectant wipes, cleaner, or spray so employees can wipe down frequently touched surfaces such as workstations, cash registers, credit card touch pad, door handles, conveyer belts, tables, cart handles, and countertops.
- Follow all applicable local, state, and federal regulations and public health agency guidelines.

## Maintain healthy business operations

- Designate a person who is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Employees should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- Consider using a hotline for employees to voice concerns anonymously.
- Implement flexible worksites (telework) for office staff to the extent feasible.
- Limit travel for multi-store personnel to only what is required for critical facility functions. Whenever possible, conduct conversations through phone calls.
- Leverage closed-circuit television (camera systems) to remotely view facilities as opposed to physically visiting the location.
- Implement flexible sick leave and supportive policies and practices. Consider drafting non-punitive emergency sick leave policies if sick leave is not offered to some or all employees. Employers should not require a positive COVID-19 test result or a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or to return to work.
- Provide information on who to contact if employees become sick. If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Implement a system in which relief workers rotate into the cashier station to allow cashiers to leave the station to wash their hands regularly.
- Consider decreasing open business hours to perform more frequent deep cleans.

## Where can I get more information?

Stay informed. Talk to your employer or supervisor, who is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. Utilize these sources for more information on reducing the risk of worker exposures to COVID-19:

- [Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) website](#)
- [NIOSH Workplace Safety and Health Topic website](#)

- [CDC COVID19 website](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility website](#)
- [OSHA COVID19 website](#) 
- [FDA Best Practices for Food Retailers During COVID-19 Pandemic website](#) 
- [FDA Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) website](#) 
- [US Department of Homeland Security website](#) 
- CDCINFO: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348 | [website](#)

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