



COVID-19 GUIDANCE: Grocery & Convenience Store Employees

Grocery and convenience store workers are considered essential to ensure an accessible food supply. Employers and employees should be aware of and follow the prevention measures to protect against COVID-19. The service these employees are providing to Pennsylvanians is exemplary, and we must all take measures to protect these employees so they can continue to stay healthy.

This guidance can and should be implemented in all life-sustaining businesses whenever applicable to protect employees and customers or clients.

Grocery stores and convenience store owners and management should review and consider implementing the following recommendations into standard operating procedures to protect employees.

Customer Protective Controls:

- Enforce social distancing in lines to separate customers by six feet whenever possible but allowing families to stay together.
- Visual cues may be helpful to implement social distancing in lines or other areas of the store. For example, tying a ribbon or using a bright piece of tape on the floor every six feet throughout the store can help customers keep a six-foot distance between themselves whenever possible.
- Install floor markings to require customers to stand behind, until it's time to complete the transaction.
- Consider limiting the number of people in the store at one time. Consider implementing the "nightclub model" of setting a maximum capacity and assigning staff to manage the number of people entering. Once maximum capacity has been reached, staff can allow more customers inside as others leave to maintain the maximum capacity and help customers shop safely. It is recommended to also encourage social distancing if lines form.
- Consider setting special hours for vulnerable populations, such as the elderly or immuno-compromised. Recommend allowing these populations to enter the store earliest in the day to reduce chances of exposure and ensure access to inventory.
- Whenever possible, encourage customers to call ahead or place orders online so that staff can select and pack up groceries for customers to pick up or have delivered.
- Encourage customers to come prepared with a list and to avoid touching objects that they do not plan to purchase.
- Ensure customers who use SNAP have access to the same delivery services and pick up options whenever possible. Consider waiving delivery fees for these customers during the COVID-19 mitigation efforts.

Employee Protective Controls:

- Consider altering store hours to allow for increased cleaning and re-stocking without customers present.
- Cross-train employees and rotate staff between cashier, stocking, and other duties, to limit mental fatigue in adhering to social distancing measures.
- Consider asking customers to bag their own groceries if possible, to limit contact with employees and divert bagging staff to other duties.
- If customers provide their own bags, restrict employees from handling them, and either bag in plastic, or have customers bag their own groceries.
- Consider installing sneeze-guards at cashier stations.
- Schedule handwashing breaks every 30-60 minutes. Employees should wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%-95% alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water.
- Assign a relief person to step in for cashiers so they can wash their hands with soap for a full 20 seconds. Provide hand lotion so workers' hands don't crack.
- Consider providing hand sanitizer at cash registers for staff and customer use in between transactions.
- If paying in cash or using coupons, recommend asking customers to place the coupons and money down on the signing shelf to eliminate any hand to hand contact with the cashier. The cashier will then put the receipt in the bag.

Facility Sanitation:

- Understand the difference between cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing.
 - If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
 - For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.
 - [Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens](#) are expected to be effective against COVID-19 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
- Increase cleaning and sanitation practices, focusing on customer high-contact objects and surfaces. Surfaces include, but are not limited to:
 - Carts and baskets
 - Customer service counter
 - Self-checkout counters and equipment
 - All touchscreen equipment (computers, iPads, drink machines)
 - Produce scales
 - Display cooler and freezer doors and handles
 - Counter tops at deli counters
 - Salad / food bars, coffee grinders, bulk food dispensing units for items such as nuts and candy
 - Condiments (salt/pepper shakers)
 - Public and employee restroom fixtures including soap dispenser plate, towel dispenser handles, door handles, baby changing stations
 - Trash receptacle touch points

- Increase cleaning and sanitation practices, focusing on employee high-contact objects and surfaces. Surfaces include, but are not limited to:
 - Food preparation area door handles and push plates, including refrigeration and freezer walk-in plastic curtains
 - Oven and microwave doors
 - Handsink fixtures
 - Dispenser handles
 - Ice scoops
 - 3-compartment sink and mop sink fixtures
 - Cleaning tools and buckets
 - Employee break rooms and timeclocks.
- Consider suspending self-service salad bars, olive bars, and hot food bars. Consider having employees provide service to customers or prepackaging items.
- Provide a safe barrier for customers or employees handling utensils such as bakery tissue paper or disposal gloves and consider cleaning utensils every 2 hours rather than the 4 hours required under Food Code regulations.
- Ensure sneeze guards are in place where required and sanitized frequently.
- Strictly enforce the Food Code requirement to prohibit employee bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food.
- Schedule cashier station sanitation breaks to allow for cleaning of belts, shelves, ATM pads, order separation bars, and other high touch surfaces.
- Take the opportunity to clean and disinfect shelves and display cases before restocking.

Tips for Managers

Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:

- Sick employees should follow [CDC-recommended steps](#). Employees 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.
- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to [CDC guidance](#) for how to conduct a risk assessment of their potential exposure.

Consider screening employees for coronavirus symptoms each day in a way that protects their confidentiality and send home employees if symptomatic. Employers should have a plan to screen employees or volunteers every day. This could include implementing a thermometer station at the employee entrance. Employees or volunteers who appear to have [symptoms](#) (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath) upon arrival at work or who become sick during the day should immediately be separated from other employees, customers, and visitors and sent home.

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). The fellow employees should then self-monitor for [symptoms](#) (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath). Be aware that some employees may be at [higher risk for serious illness](#), such as [older adults](#) and those with chronic medical conditions. Consider minimizing 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.

Provide COVID-19 prevention disease training to all employees, and specific training on new store protocols related to COVID-19 protective measures. Educate employees on the [steps to protect themselves](#) and to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Post [CDC guidelines](#) in breakrooms and discourage employees with key symptoms from coming to work.

Social distancing recommendations must be met (i.e., limit contact of people within 6 feet from each other). Consider: only operating every other register or check-out lane, ensuring work space between workers is at least 6 feet, staggering work schedules if possible, limiting in-person meetings, ensuring break areas accommodate social distancing.

Support your employees by relaxing all existing production standards and productivity monitoring systems for the duration of this event. Talk to staff regularly to ensure their feedback is being heard and concerns are being addressed as able.

Explore scheduling adaptations to accommodate childcare arrangements.

For employee working overtime and shift work, make sure that there are at least 12 hours from the end of one shift to the beginning of the next shift so that employees working extra hours have plenty of time to travel to and from home and get 8 hours of sleep.

Be alert for and do not tolerate racism or discrimination against workers or customers.

Consider paid leave time to cover the quarantine, isolation and COVID-19 related illnesses for your employees. Consider waiving any waiting or accrual period outlined in leave time policy or union contract.

Put up signage about the changes in business model and practices so customers know what to expect and how to protect themselves.

Explore ways to reduce handling of paper coupons, including substitutes that will not present a hardship to customers.

Consider waiving grocery pick-up fees for customers to avoid in-store crowds.

Encourage the use of credit cards over cash.

Tips for Employees

Retail food workers are among the heroes of the COVID-19 pandemic response. We need to protect the health of retail food workers throughout the duration of the pandemic. Employees can take steps to protect themselves at work and at home.

Retail food workers are feeling the pressure of trying to keep shelves stocked. They are working faster, skipping breaks, and working more hours. Stress, fatigue, and constant exposure to the public can make retail workers more vulnerable. **Take breaks!** Other people's urgency is real, but it cannot come at the expense of your health.

Take extra handwashing breaks. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%-95% alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water. Keep in mind that everything you scan at the cash register was handled by multiple people including customers; and that you handle money, coupons, and credit cards or store cards. Use the hand scanner for store cards, if possible. Consider sanitizing hands in between checking out each customer if sanitizer is available. Whether sanitizer is available or not, take your handwashing breaks. There is no substitute for proper handwashing.

If sanitizer is available for customer use, encourage customers to use after touching pads, pens, or other items around the register during checkout. Whenever possible, limit customers' touching items around the register.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Secure your hair, to avoid having to touch your face to adjust stray hairs. Make a concerted effort to keep your hands away from your face, eyes, nose and mouth while working.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Learn more about [coughing and sneezing](#) etiquette on the CDC website.

Clean AND disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, and doorknobs. Dirty surfaces can be cleaned with soap and water prior to disinfection. To disinfect, use [products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2](#)[external icon](#), the cause of COVID-19, and are appropriate for the surface.

If you use a cellphone, remember that you touch it with your hands and hold it against your face. Use a disinfecting wipe on it regularly and before you take it home where family members might use it.

Do not use other workers' phones, work tools, or share food or beverages. Clean and disinfect communal tools before and after use.

Take care of your own health. Get plenty of sleep. Get the flu shot, keep all your other vaccinations up-to-date, including tetanus.

Immediately notify your manager if you feel unwell before, during, or after a shift. If you are sick, please stay home.