



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. Governor Tom Wolf and Department of Health Secretary, Dr. Levine, have issued an [order](#), effective April 19, 2020, directing protections for critical workers who are employed at businesses that are authorized to maintain in-person operations during the COVID-19 disaster emergency.

Grocery stores and convenience store owners and management should review and consider implementing the following measures into standard operating procedures to protect employees. *Measures that are mandatory to implement under the Order, are in green italics.*

Customer Protective Controls:

- *Where feasible, businesses should conduct business with the public by appointment only and to the extent that this is not feasible, businesses must limit occupancy to no greater than 50% of the number stated on the applicable certificate of occupancy at any given time, as necessary to reduce crowding in the business.*
- *Businesses should encourage use of online ordering by providing delivery or pick-up options.*
- *Businesses must maintain a social distance of 6 feet at check-out and counter lines and must place signage throughout each site to mandate social distancing for both customers and employees.*
- *Businesses must designate a specific time for high-risk and elderly persons to use the business at least once every week if there is a continuing in-person customer-facing component*
- *Require all customers to wear masks while on premises, and deny entry to individuals not wearing masks, unless the business is providing medication, medical supplies, or food, in which case the business must provide alternative methods of pick-up or delivery of such goods. However, individuals who cannot wear a mask due to a medical condition (including children under the age of 2 years per CDC guidance) may enter the premises and are not required to provide documentation of such medical condition.*
- 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.
- 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.
- Consider posting signs to raise awareness about the need for universal masking of employees AND customers in the store.

Employee Protective Controls:

- *Based on the building size and number of employees, alter hours of business so that the business has sufficient time to clean or to restock or both;*
- 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.
- *Install shields or other barriers at registers and check-out areas to physically separate cashiers and customers or take other measures to ensure social distancing of customers from check-out personnel, or close lines to maintain a social distance between of 6 feet between lines;*
- *Provide masks for employees to wear during their time at the business, and make it a mandatory requirement to wear masks while on the work site, except to the extent an employee is using break time to eat or drink, in accordance with the guidance from the Department of Health and the CDC. Employers may approve masks obtained or made by employees in accordance with Department of Health guidance.*
- *Provide employees access to regular handwashing with soap, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes. Schedule handwashing breaks every hour.*
- 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.).
 - For more information see the PDA Guidance document [Procedures for Sanitization and Diagnosed Employees](#)
- Increase cleaning and sanitation practices, focusing on customer high-contact objects and surfaces. Surfaces include, but are not limited to:
 - 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
 - *An employee must be assigned to wipe down Carts and baskets available for customers' use before they become available to each customer entering the premises.*
- 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.
- *Ensure that common areas (including but not limited to break rooms, locker rooms, dining facilities, rest rooms, conference or training rooms) are cleaned on a regular basis, including between any shifts.*
- 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.
- *In businesses with multiple check-out lines, only use every other register, or fewer. After every hour, rotate customers and employees to the previously closed registers. Clean the previously open registers and the surrounding area, including **credit card machines, following each rotation;***
- Take the opportunity to clean and disinfect shelves and display cases before restocking.

Other Business Requirements

Ensure that the facility has a sufficient number of employees to perform all measures listed effectively and in a manner that ensures the safety of the public and employees.

Ensure that the facility has a sufficient number of personnel to control access, maintain order, and enforce social distancing of at least 6 feet.

Prohibit non-essential visitors from entering the premises of the business.

Stagger work start and stop times for employees when practicable to prevent gatherings of large groups entering or leaving the premises at the same time.

Provide sufficient amount of space for employees to have breaks and meals while maintaining a social distance of 6 feet, while arranging seating to have employees facing forward and not across from each other in eating and break settings.

Stagger employee break times to reduce the number of employees on break at any given time so that appropriate social distancing of at least 6 feet may be followed.

Limit persons in employee common areas (such as locker or break rooms, dining facilities, training or conference rooms) at any one time to the number of employees that can maintain a social distance of 6 feet.

Conduct meetings and trainings virtually (i.e., by phone or through the internet). If a meeting must be held in person, limit the meeting to the fewest number of employees possible, not to exceed 10 employees at one time, and maintain a social distance of 6 feet;

Ensure that all employees are made aware of these required procedures by communicating them, either orally or in writing, in their native or preferred language, as well as in English or by a methodology that allows them to understand

Tips for Managers

Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:

- *Employees who have symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath) should notify their supervisor and 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 county 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 the [CDC Interim Guidance for Implementing Safety Practice for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19](#) published on April 8, 2020.

If your business has an employee with a probable or confirmed case of COVID 19, follow the outlined requirements found in the PDA Guidance document [Procedures for Sanitization and Diagnosed Employees](#). Those requirements will include:

Closing off areas visited by the employee. Ventilating, waiting as long as practical, and then cleaning and disinfecting.

Cleaning and disinfecting all common areas used by the employee, such as break rooms, bathrooms, conference rooms, keyboards, ATM machines, and similar.

Identifying all other employees that were in close contact (within 6 feet for 10 minutes or more) with the person with a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19 from 48 hours prior to symptom onset to the time of isolation.

Following the [CDC Interim Guidance for Implementing Safety Practice for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19](#) published on April 8, 2020.

Implement temperature screening before an employee enters the business, prior to the start of each shift or, for employees who do not work shifts, before the employee starts work, and send employees home that have an elevated temperature or fever of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. Ensure employees practice social distancing while waiting to have temperatures screened.

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.

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.

Employers are encouraged to implement liberal paid time off for employees who do not return to work because of quarantine, isolation and COVID-19 related illnesses. 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 your mandated hourly handwashing breaks. 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. 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.

Wear a cloth mask as required by public health officials and encourage fellow employees and customers to wear theirs. Remember the saying: **"My mask protects you, your mask protects me."**

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.