

COVID-19 Guidelines for Grocery Stores

Interim notice On November 16, Governor Inslee issued [proclamation 20-25.8](#) “Stay Safe-Stay Healthy” statewide restrictions to help slow the rapid spread of COVID-19 cases in our state. Unless extended, the restrictions will be in until January 4, 2021.

Grocery stores may remain open but **must limit indoor capacity to 25% and close indoor seating/dining areas**. For example, the espresso counter in a grocery store can remain open and provide beverages to-go, but the seating area (table and chairs) must be closed. We recommend food establishments stack their indoor tables and chairs to discourage customer use. For more information, see the Governor’s Office – [In-Store Retail Operations COVID-19 Requirements](#).

On May 4, Governor Inslee announced “[Safe Start Washington](#)” a phased approach to recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Phase 1, grocery stores are essential businesses that have remained open if they make changes to ensure customer and worker safety. No onsite dining is allowed during Phase 1. Once a county moves into Phase 2, grocers must meet the governor’s [Phase 2 Limited In-Store Retail Requirements](#). At this time, Phase 3 and Phase 4 industry specific information is not available. We will update this document when it becomes available.

Use the guidance below to help comply with the [governor’s requirements](#) for each phase and ensure employee and customer safety while operating during this pandemic. [Washington State Retail Food Code](#) and the governor’s requirements are listed below. Recommendations are included under the heading “recommendations.” Consult with your [local health department](#) for county specific requirements or restrictions.

Public Health Investigations

- Notify your local health department within 24 hours if you suspect COVID-19 is spreading in your workplace, or if you are aware of 2 or more employees who develop confirmed or suspected COVID-19 within a 14-day period.
- Cooperate with public health authorities in the investigation of cases, suspected cases, outbreaks, and suspected outbreaks of COVID-19; cooperate with the implementation of infection control measures, including but not limited to isolation and quarantine and environmental cleaning; and comply with all public health authority orders and directives.

COVID-19 Safety Plan

- Develop a written plan that addresses physical distancing, protective equipment, hygiene, cleaning, communication, screening, and disinfection of contaminated areas. Use the [Phase 3 Safe Start Plan Template](#). This plan must be retained onsite and made available to regulatory agencies upon request.

Styles of Service & Occupancy

Phase 1

- Onsite dining is not allowed. Provide pick-up, drive-through or delivery services.

Recommendations

- Remove or stack tables and chairs if dining areas can be assessed by customers.
- Work with your local health department to ensure safe processes if making changes to your menu or style of service.
- If you choose to close, consider donating food using food safety recommendations in this [guide](#).

Phase 2

- Any onsite dining must follow the [COVID-19 Guidelines for Restaurants](#).
- Do not exceed 30% of the maximum building occupancy determined by the fire code. Occupancy limit does not include employees.
- Provide pick-up, drive-through or delivery services whenever possible.

Phase 3 & Phase 4: Information posted when available.

Customer Log

Phase 1, Phase 2, & Phase 3

Maintain a daily log of all guests that **voluntarily** provide contact information, including customer names, phone/email, and time/date they were in the facility. Maintain the log for 30 days to help with contact tracing. For more information see:

- [Governor's Customer Log Memo](#)
- [Customer Log Template](#)

Phase 4: Information will be posted when available.

Customer Self-Service

Phase 1

- Close self-service at salad bars and buffets.
- Provide wrapped self-service condiments and disposable service ware, such as single-service packets or carry-out utensils.

Recommendations

- Discontinue product sampling and demonstration stations, except for single portions offered in response to a consumer's request from the service counter.
- Self-service of fountain drinks is acceptable when touchpoints are disinfected hourly, and all single-service utensils are stored behind the counter and provided to the customer by a food worker.

Phase 2 & Phase 3

- Self-service at salad bars, buffets, and other communal food sources and drink stations may resume if increased safety is provided through the following:
 - Physical distancing of customers in line.
 - All sneeze guards, utensils, and other customer-service equipment are properly in place and used.
 - Any food that has been contaminated by customers or employees (i.e. touching food or sneezing and/or coughing along the service line) is discarded.
 - Staff monitor the areas to maintain proper food temperature and customer usage.
 - Serving utensil touchpoints are sanitized or replaced with clean utensils at least every hour in Phase 2 and every two hours in Phase 3.
 - Ensure non-food contact surfaces, particularly touchpoints such as counters, hand rails, etc. are properly washed and disinfected at least every hour in Phase 2 and every two hours in Phase 3.
 - Hand gel, with 60% alcohol, is available for customer use.
- Provide wrapped self-service condiments and disposable service ware, such as single-service packets or carry-out utensils.

Recommendations

- Discontinue product sampling and demonstration stations, except for single portions offered in response to a consumer's request from the service counter.

Phase 4: Information will be posted when available.

Customer Face Coverings

- Beginning June 26, everyone in an indoor public space, or in an outside public space when unable to physically distance from others, is legally required to wear a face covering.
- Beginning July 7, businesses will not be able to serve customers or visitors who aren't wearing face coverings. Individuals with certain health or medical conditions or disabilities are exempt from the requirement to wear a face covering. Businesses can offer to provide accommodations such as curbside pick-up, delivery, or scheduling of visits during non-peak hours. No one is required to carry proof or documentation of their health condition or disability.
- Customers must wear a face covering anytime they are not seated (such as while arriving, leaving, or going to the restroom) and while they are talking at tables and not eating.
- For more information see:
 - [Overview of COVID-19 Statewide Face Covering Requirements](#)
 - [Public Health Order 20-03](#) – Washington State Department of Health
 - [Proclamation 20-25.6](#) – Office of the Governor
 - [Cloth Face Coverings](#) – Washington State Department of Health
 - [Guidance on Cloth Face Coverings](#) – Washington State Department of Health
 - [Cloth Face Covers](#) – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Customer Health & Hygiene

- Stock onsite restrooms/sinks with adequate soap and paper towels.
- Provide hand gel at building entrance for all staff and customers, if available.

Recommendations

- Increase circulation of outdoor air by modifying ventilation or opening screened doors/windows, when possible.

Customer Physical Distancing

Phase 1 & Phase 2

- Use distance markers to maintain 6 feet of distance between customers in lines waiting to enter, in high-traffic areas within the establishment, and at check-out lines.
- Assign employees to assist and monitor customers waiting to enter the establishment.
- Arrange flow of customers to eliminate bottlenecks and reduce crowding.
- When possible, provide shopping hours for people at [higher risk](#) for severe COVID-19 illness.

Recommendations

- Establish designated areas for pick-up and deliveries, limiting contact to the extent possible.
- Encourage customers to shop at less popular times to avoid congestion.

Phase 3 & Phase 4: Information posted when available.

Payment

- Use contactless payment systems or automated ordering, when possible.

Recommendations

- Disinfect check-out counters and payment touchpads at least every hour when in Phase 1 and Phase 2, and every 2 hours when in Phase 3.
- Provide handwashing or hand gel for employees handling payment.

Signage

- Post signs at entrances and throughout the store to inform customers to:
 - Stay home if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.
 - Use cloth face coverings when visiting the establishment.
 - Observe occupancy limits and practice proper physical distancing.

Recommendations

- Find COVID-19 specific posters and materials here:
 - [Wear a Face Covering Sign](#)
 - [Washington State Coronavirus Response Partner Toolkit](#)
 - [King County Signs to Print and Post](#)
 - [CDC's COVID-19 Print Resources](#)

Sanitation

- Cleaning is a necessary first step for sanitizing and disinfecting chemicals to work effectively. Use soap and water to clean food and non-food contact surfaces.
- Wash, rinse, and sanitize food contact surfaces following routine procedures. Use an EPA registered product (such as chlorine, quaternary ammonia or iodine) at a concentration appropriate for sanitizing food contact surfaces.
- Clean and disinfect high-touch non-food contact surfaces frequently, such as customer restrooms, doors, handles for freezers/refrigerators, check-out counters, and payment touchpads.

- Use an [EPA registered product](#) at a concentration that has been shown to be effective against COVID-19. Follow label directions.
- If disinfectants are in short supply, use alternative disinfectants (for example, 1/3 cup of household bleach added to 1 gallon of water, or 70% alcohol solutions). Follow label instructions for application and proper ventilation. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Bleach solutions are effective for disinfection up to 24 hours.
- Ensure operating hours allow downtime between shifts for thorough cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting.
- Ensure employee equipment including handhelds/wearables, scanners, radios, or other tools are properly cleaned and disinfected before and after use.

Recommendations

- Disinfect non-food contact surfaces at least every hour when in Phase 1 and Phase 2, and every 2 hours when in Phase 3.
- See the NC State Extension Factsheets on COVID-19 Preventative Measures for more information:
 - [What is the Difference between Cleaning, Sanitizing, Disinfecting and Sterilizing?](#)
 - [Cleaning and Disinfection](#)

Employees Health & Hygiene

- Develop COVID-19 specific employee illness policies and procedures:
 - Screen workers for COVID-19 symptoms prior to each shift by following the [Daily COVID-19 Screening of Staff and Visitors guidance](#). We recommend that workers take their own temperature at home and report to the person in charge (PIC) and stay home if they are experiencing a fever (100.4° or higher).
 - Exclude ill food workers for the required time and make sure that they are safe to return to work by following [DOH Employee Health & Decision Strategies guidance](#).
 - Follow current guidelines when responding to reported COVID-19 positive employee including reporting and contact tracing. Close any areas where an employee with probable or confirmed COVID-19 worked, touched surfaces, etc. until the area and equipment is cleaned and disinfected. Follow the [cleaning guidelines](#) set by the CDC to deep clean and disinfect.
- Stock handwashing sinks and retrain staff on proper handwashing times and procedures.
- Increase utensil washing frequency, handwashing, or use disposable gloves when tools are shared.
- The Governor issued [Proclamation 20-46.1](#) that requires employers to offer [high-risk](#) employees, as defined by the CDC, alternative work assignments, including telework, alternative, or remote work locations, and if an alternative assignment is not feasible, retain the position of the high risk worker. The proclamation expires August 1, 2020, unless otherwise extended.

Recommendations

- Provide hand gel with at least 60% alcohol, when available.
- Reconfigure employee break times and locations to reduce close contact exposure.

Employee Training

- Train the PIC in the language they understand best to:
 - Monitor employee status for [COVID-19 symptoms](#) prior to each shift, in addition to the employee health requirements in the Food Code.
 - Enforce the food establishment's COVID-19 specific written procedures.
- Train workers in the language they understand best on:
 - Identifying symptoms of COVID illness, how to prevent transmission, required hand hygiene, and illness reporting requirements. Reinforce general employee health and safety. For additional information see [Basic Employee Training on COVID-19 Infection Prevention](#) from Washington State Department of Labor & Industries.
 - Cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting properly.
 - Implementing the COVID-19 specific written procedures including physical distancing and other needed changes.

Employee Physical Distancing

- Ensure 6 foot separation is maintained between customers and other staff except for unavoidable, short-term exposures such as when collecting payments and/or exchanging goods.
- Minimize staff or customer interactions in narrow or enclosed areas, use barriers, stagger breaks and work shift starts when strict physical distancing is not feasible for a specific task.
- Barriers should be used at all fixed locations of potential interactions between employees that could be less than 6 feet.

Recommendations

- Barriers should be a smooth, rigid surface that is easily cleanable and of sufficient height to provide adequate protection from coughs and sneezes.

Employee Safety & PPE

- Limit the sharing of objects and discourage touching of shared surfaces; or when in contact with shared objects or frequently touched areas, wear gloves; use alcohol-based hand gel or wash hands before and after contact.
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, goggles, face shields, and face masks as appropriate or required to employees for the activity being performed.
- Employers must provide cloth facial coverings to employees, unless their exposure dictates a higher level of protection under the Department of Labor and Industries' safety and health rules. This is not a substitute for 6 foot physical distancing.
 - Reusable cloth face coverings may be used when risk for transmission is low, such as for waiters at restaurants or cafes with curbside pick-up services only.
 - Disposable masks are required when risk for transmission is medium, such as for grocery-store produce stockers who work during store hours around customers or kitchen workers in restaurants.
- Face coverings must be cleaned or replaced after use or when damaged or soiled, may not be shared, and must be properly stored or discarded.

- Employees with medical or disability issues preventing mask use may provide their medical professional's accommodation statement specifying that facial covering or masks should not be worn due to their condition to their employer for consideration of an accommodation.
- For additional information see:
 - [Which Mask for Which Task?](#) – Washington State Department of Labor & Industries
 - [Coronavirus Facial Covering and Mask Requirements](#) – Washington State Department of Labor & Industries
 - [Coronavirus Common Questions Regarding Worker Face Covering and Mask Requirements](#) – Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

Resources

- [Business Signage Toolkit](#)
- [King County Guidance for Grocery Stores to Minimize the Spread of COVID-19](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 Signage and Posters](#)
- [FDA Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [DOH Food Worker and Establishment Guidance on COVID-19](#)
- [DOH COVID-19 Guidelines for Restaurants](#)
- [DOH COVID-19 Employee Health & Decision Strategies](#)

More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

The risk of COVID-19 is not connected to race, ethnicity or nationality. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)
- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

Have more questions about COVID-19? Call our hotline: **1-800-525-0127**. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. (Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.) For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact your health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.