

A quick guide to safe shopping during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic



No reported cases of COVID-19 have been linked to contaminated food. The main risk to shoppers is coming into contact with an infected person. You are urged to wash your hands frequently, maintain good hygiene practices and minimise contact with people outside of your household.

This guide will help you to stay safe and protect others when shopping for essentials. Please note that this guide is based upon current advice at the time of publication (31 March 2020).

Before shopping

To protect yourself and others, try to reduce the frequency of your shopping trips, because you will put yourself at a greater risk than if you were to stay at home.

Ask yourself the following:

- Am I well enough to go shopping? If you are feeling ill, you must not go out
- Am I in the group that requires shielding? If yes, then again you must not go out
- Do I need to shop today?
- Could I manage without certain items and make do? For example, could I bake my own bread?
- Am I potentially vulnerable, and if so, could I ask someone else to shop for me?
- Can I go to quieter local shops or arrange with local shops for collection or deliveries?
- Could I shop online?

If possible, avoid taking your children to the shops and try to shop at off-peak times to avoid the crowds.

Most shops now have special times for the elderly to shop to reduce risks to them. These are usually in the morning but check with your local store. There may also be special arrangements for health care workers.

Make an inventory of what items you have and when it will go out of date so you can use them in date order and avoid wasting food and money by buying things you don't need.

Make a list and ensure you have enough food to last until your next planned shop. Use your freezer to store shorter life, perishable items such as bread and meats.

This is not a licence to panic-buy but to buy essential items. It is best to limit shopping trips to once a week as this reduces the risk of getting the disease or spreading it to others.

Assess infection control measures in your local stores. Some will be better than others. Use the store doing the most to protect staff and customers.

Is your supermarket doing enough?

Things to look out for include:

- Controlling the entry and exit of customers to limit overcrowding
- Cleaning and sanitising trolleys and baskets between use
- Provision of hand sanitisers (with a minimum alcohol content of 60+%) at entrances and exits
- Clear marking on floors to help customers maintain social distance
- Messages via posters and public address systems reminding customers and staff to maintain social distance
- Staff practicing social distancing on the shop floor
- Staff cleaning critical contact areas such as screens on self-service checkouts and debit card PIN pads
- Baked goods (such as bread, croissants, scones) are covered to protect from sneezes and coughs
- Sneeze shields in place to protect staff at service counters and checkouts
- Customers being encouraged to use contactless payment rather than cash

- Separate shopping times for vulnerable people, such as the elderly
- Depending on the layout of the supermarket, facilitating a one-way system for shoppers (as many supermarket aisles do not allow for social distancing measures)

Take your own shopping bags and, if possible, put goods directly into the bags, avoiding baskets or trolleys. It may be safer to use disposable bags at this time as they can be recycled or repurposed after 72 hours (the current indication is that this is how long the virus can live on hard surfaces).

During shopping

Try to avoid peak shopping times, although it may now be difficult to determine when these are.

Maintain a safe social distance of two metres from all other shoppers and staff – this includes routes into and out of the store. You may have to queue outside before gaining access. If other shoppers are closing in on your safe social distancing space, move away or remind them of the requirement in a calm, friendly and polite manner.

If you need to handle a basket or trolley, ask if it has been sanitised since last being used. If not, sanitise using either your own sanitiser or that provided by the store.

Sanitise your hands when you enter the store, ideally with your own sanitiser or, if available, that provided by the store. Avoid contact with surfaces as much as possible.

Don't delay while shopping or chat with neighbours/friends/store staff.

If you are planning to remain at home for long periods of time, consider buying non-perishable foods such as canned goods or dry mixes that don't require refrigeration, such as ready-to-eat canned meats, fruit and vegetables. But make sure you buy things you like and will use!

Try to use only one hand (your non-dominant hand) to pick up goods and place into your bag/basket/trolley. This is to avoid contamination of your hands.

If possible, try to minimise direct hand contact with food by using available tongs and utensils. While you may ordinarily avoid plastic-wrapping, now might be the time to stick to wrapped/package goods.

Don't touch your mouth, nose or eyes – this is the main reason for suggesting that you pick up goods with your non-dominant hand.

Make a contactless payment if possible, be vigilant when maintaining distance and avoid chatting to service desk/check out staff.

Sanitise your hands on leaving the shop (if possible) and again when you get into your car, if you use a car.

After shopping

If shopping for a vulnerable person, leave the shopping on the doorstep, ring the bell or phone them and stand back while they collect it.

Wash your hands immediately when you return home.

Plan how you will deal with your shopping in advance of coming home.

Designate a cleared, disinfected area to sort out your shopping.

Prior to stocking your fridges and cupboards, wipe shelving with sanitiser and a paper towel, then discard.

Coronavirus can survive on hard surfaces, so wipe the outside of all canned/hard surface pack goods (tetra packs) with a paper towel/warm soapy water, sanitise (following the manufacturer's guidance). Alternatively leave non-perishable foods in a safe place for 72 hours.

Remove outer food packaging and discard, being careful to limit handling of the inner packaging of items such as yoghurts.

Wipe down fridge and cupboard handles with sanitiser, a paper towel and discard.

Wash your hands again after you have unpacked and put your shopping bags away.

Further information

[Government guidance on coronavirus for food businesses](#)

[Tips on how to handle deliveries including food deliveries](#)

Credits

This guidance is for both the UK and Ireland. It has been produced jointly by [Chartered Institute of Environmental Health \(CIEH\)](#), [Environmental Health Association of Ireland \(EHAI\)](#), and [Irish Global Health Network \(IGHN\)](#).

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