

What steps can you take to protect yourself from coronavirus whilst shopping for food and groceries?

Being aware of basic information related to coronavirus will help minimise your risks of becoming infected whilst going about necessary activities such as shopping for food and groceries.

- Coronavirus is spread through droplet infection by means of close contact with an infected person who would have coughed or sneezed in your immediate vicinity or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your nose, eyes or mouth without washing or sanitising your hands
- There are a number of factors to consider when assessing risk of infection namely, the amount of viral particles which need to be transferred to infect an individual (also referred to as the viral load) and the length of time that the viral particles survive on different types of materials.
- Although evidence has been found that coronavirus may survive up to 24 hours on cardboard and up to 2–3 days on plastic and stainless steel, the risk of getting infected with food packaging is considered to be low.

On the basis of this information and the general advice given by Public Health Authorities in relation to social distancing, good respiratory hygiene and appropriate hand washing techniques, there are a number of measures that can make grocery shopping a safer experience with respect to possible infection with coronavirus.

Before your shopping trip

- If possible, order your groceries online or over the phone and see whether the supermarket or corner shop or food business would consider delivering your food supplies.
- If you are elderly or within the vulnerable category and advised not to leave your house, have your groceries delivered by a relative or a neighbour where possible
- A number of shops within your locality may have organised themselves to provide delivery services. Your local council could be able to guide you as to which shops are providing such a service
- Plan your shopping list in advance to avoid spending unnecessary time in the establishment.

- It is preferable to purchase food for a number of days; if possible, avoid going repeatedly for a small number of items.
- Plan to go to the supermarket or corner shop at a time when it is less busy in order to minimise contact with other people.

During your shopping trip

- Always maintain a physical distance of around 2 metres between yourself and others outside and inside the establishment. Pay particular attention at all counters (delicatessen, meat, fish, pastry, fruit and vegetables), at cashiers and when using points of sale machines.
- **Commit to touch only those items that you intend to purchase - RESPECT OTHER SHOPPERS**
- Be aware of your actions and avoid touching your face at all times
- There is no need to wear gloves whilst shopping since this may provide a false sense of security and you would wash your hands less frequently than you would without gloves.
- If you have disinfectant wipes available, it would be ideal to wipe well the handles of the shopping trolleys before using them.
- Use contactless methods of payment where possible.

After your shopping trip

- When coming home with your shopping it is important to wash your hands well with soap and water for 20 seconds ensuring proper hand hygiene
- Although as stated above the risk of infection from food packaging is low, one may decide to disinfect the outer surfaces of newly purchased items.
- Food items that do not require refrigeration or which you do not intend to use immediately could be stored in a place where they will not be touched for a few days.
- After a few days you should still wipe down the items which were kept aside.
- In the case of those food items that you would like to use immediately OR items that must be refrigerated OR fresh food items such as meats and vegetables a number of things can be done: -

- Fresh food items can be placed in your own containers with the outer package discarded. If for example you have cereal or crackers which have an internal package, keep the inner package and discard the outer package.
- Where items have an outside plastic package or a metal food container, these can be wiped down with a kitchen cloth saturated with soap.
- Fruit and vegetables should be cleaned carefully under running water or in a previously cleaned sink with copious amounts of water. Raw sprouts and frozen berries should be thoroughly heated before consumption. Although international guidance does not include this additional requirement, there is also the possibility of using appropriate food sterilising chlorine tablets which are sold in pharmacies.
- It is important that once all food packaging is discarded you clean the kitchen surfaces where you were handling the items and packages
- Finally, when you finish handling, always ensure that you wash your hands well with soap and water for 20 seconds.