

# PROTECTING WORKERS

from COVID-19

## GROCERY STORE WORKERS



### What hazards do grocery store workers face in this pandemic?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, grocery store workers are considered an essential service. Many work longer hours, have to deal with upset customers, all while being exposed to additional cleaning and disinfecting chemicals – sometimes incorrectly and without attention to their hazards. Grocery store workers need protection from existing hazards and special protection from the coronavirus.

### How should grocery store workers be protected during the pandemic?

Employers are required by law to provide healthy and safe workplaces. This includes finding ways to prevent exposure to COVID-19. All workplaces should have a pandemic plan developed with the workplace health and safety committee which includes both workers and employers.

#### 1. Avoid contact and increase physical distance for everyone in the store

The distance between everyone in the store should be at least 2 metres/6.5 feet.

##### To keep physical distance between customers and workers:

- ✓ control and monitor number of people entering the store
- ✓ provide visual clues about distances (e.g., tape, paint, cones) for line-ups (inside and outside) and aisles
- ✓ clearly mark and enforce one-way traffic in aisles where possible
- ✓ use only every second check-out station
- ✓ install physical barriers at check-out stands, extending as far as possible beside the belts on either side of the cashier
- ✓ install similar barriers at customer service desks and other spots where staff engage with customers
- ✓ encourage the use of debit and credit cards instead of cash payments
- ✓ use hand-held scanners to avoid touching purchases, loyalty cards and coupons
- ✓ stock shelves when the store is closed or at off-peak hours with the aisle closed
- ✓ ensure workers have training to safely handle returned, recycled or re-used goods

#### HOW COVID-19 IS SPREAD



The virus gets into the air when people with it sneeze, cough, shout, sing, and/or talk loudly. Sometimes it just takes sick people breathing in our direction. The longer and closer we are to someone infected with the virus, the greater the possibility we will get it.

There are two main ways to pick-up the virus. The most common is inhaling infected particles in the air. The other is touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth. The virus can stay in the air and on surfaces from a few hours to several days, depending on air movements and the material.

### To keep physical distance between workers:

- ✓ stagger times workers arrive, take breaks, leave, etc.
- ✓ limit crew sizes with staggered/more shifts
- ✓ have fewer people at trainings, meetings, etc.
- ✓ create extra space in break and meeting areas, such as spaced-apart seats
- ✓ provide dedicated workstations, tools, and equipment for each person

Ensure clear and prominent signage for workers and customers outlining physical distancing requirements and that no form of violence/abuse will be tolerated.

## 2. Clean more and sanitize and disinfect as needed – *with safer products*

**Increased cleaning can reduce the spread of the virus. Clean dirty and high-touch spots hourly.** Disinfect only as needed. Have separate equipment for customer and food preparation areas. Have a system to keep used carts and baskets separate from clean ones.

### CLEANING, SANITIZING & DISINFECTING



#### What are the differences?

**CLEANING:** Physically removes dirt and germs on surfaces or objects using soap/detergent, water and friction. **This must be done before sanitizing and disinfecting.**

**SANITIZING\*:** Reduces germs on surfaces to levels considered safe for public health. This is recommended for food handling and preparation areas

**DISINFECTING\*:** Destroys almost all germs. Some disinfecting chemicals are not appropriate for use in food preparation areas.

\*Products must be registered with Health Canada or the US EPA and should be approved to kill coronavirus.

**For more information read “Safer Cleaning Practices for the Workplace” at [mflohc.mb.ca/covid-19](http://mflohc.mb.ca/covid-19)**

## 3. Have the right personal protective equipment (PPE)



Personal protective equipment is essential in a pandemic. The employer must supply it and make sure it is right for the job and fits the worker. Anyone who is cleaning and disinfecting needs extra PPE, depending on the products used, such as nitrile gloves to protect hands, or a respirator for toxic products.



Change disposable gloves frequently. Take them off before eating, using the bathroom, touching the face, or smoking. Replace soiled gloves immediately and put used ones in a lined waste container. Wash hands before and after changing gloves and removing other PPE. Employers must train workers on how to put on and take off PPE properly.



***If there’s a problem with any PPE or other protections, report it immediately to a supervisor.***

## 4. Frequent hand washing

One of the best ways to remove the virus is washing hands with soap and water. Hand-washing breaks are essential and should be scheduled. Cashiers and baggers should be able to wash their hands every 30 minutes. All workers, including delivery staff, need easy access to bathrooms with warm running water, and enough supplies of soap and paper towels to wash hands:



- ✓ when they arrive and leave work
- ✓ before putting on and after taking off PPE (especially respirators, mask and gloves)
- ✓ after close contact with people, surfaces, equipment or tools
- ✓ after blowing nose, coughing, or sneezing.

When that’s not possible, hand sanitizers (60-80% ethanol/ethyl alcohol or 60-75% isopropyl alcohol/isopropanol) must be available. Touchless dispensers are best throughout the store. If the product doesn’t include hand lotion, workers need separate water-based hand lotion – without fragrances – to avoid chapping/dry skin.

***Hand sanitizer and gloves do not replace good handwashing practices.***

## 5. Wash all cleaning materials and work clothes safely

It's best to have separate work clothes and lockers for what is worn to work. Where possible, the employer should look after laundry for work clothes. If cleaning soiled clothing/linen/laundry at home or elsewhere:

- ✓ handle as little as possible, with no shaking, and wash your hands immediately afterwards.
- ✓ put wet contaminated laundry into a leak-proof container and transport it in that
- ✓ wash clothes in the warmest water possible with detergent and dry thoroughly.

## 6. Keep sick people out of the workplace

Workplace policies need to be updated to ensure:

- ✓ safe protocols for turning away customers who exhibit symptoms of illness
- ✓ workers are screened before coming into the store (e.g., standard symptom questions) and no one enters if they may be sick
- ✓ there are no incentives or pressures to come to work
- ✓ paid, flexible leave and benefits are established
- ✓ workers who are more likely to get sick, or are pregnant, are allowed to stay home without losing pay or seniority
- ✓ there is no retaliation or penalty for reporting symptoms or hazards, or taking sick leave.

## Other important workplace practices

- ✓ Allow extra time for workers to do their jobs and take necessary precautions
- ✓ Remove productivity quotas (e.g. customers served per hour) to allow time for precautions
- ✓ Allow at least 12 hours off between shifts, for travel, rest and sleep
- ✓ Delivery workers need protection too – proper gloves, masks, and hand sanitizer should be supplied along with no-contact delivery options
- ✓ Ventilation systems should be set to take in all fresh air. Recirculated air should go through high-efficiency (HEPA) filters. Intakes and returns need to be cleaned daily and filters changed regularly
- ✓ Provide information to workers about mental health resources available to them



## INFORMATION AND TRAINING ARE ESSENTIAL

Employers must give all workers and supervisors information and training about possible job hazards, including special hazards of COVID-19. During the pandemic this includes:

- ✓ the workplace pandemic plan
- ✓ signs and symptoms of the virus, along with reporting symptoms and taking sick leave
- ✓ hand-washing and sanitizers
- ✓ new or changed tasks and procedures (e.g., cleaning, disinfecting), with related hazards and protections
- ✓ PPE – its purpose, limitations, safely putting on and taking off
- ✓ available community mental health resources
- ✓ procedures to de-escalate, report and deal with all types of violence
- ✓ available community mental health resources

**Information – including posters – should be easy to understand and provided in the workers' languages.**

## RESOURCES:

**For resources and up-to-date information on Coronavirus (COVID-19) visit:**

**[mflhcc.ca/covid-19](https://mflhcc.ca/covid-19)**



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