



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Grocery Shopping During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

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During the current [Safer At Home Order](#) in place for Wisconsin, a trip to the store for food and essential supplies is one of the only times many people leave their homes.

Prepping for the trip can feel overwhelming, here are some answers to frequently asked questions to help you prepare.

“What is the safest way to shop inside a grocery store?”

The biggest threat is not from food or surfaces in the store, it's the **other people**.

According to the CDC, COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. It spreads also when a person touches a surface contaminated with coronavirus then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes. However, the CDC notes that this type of transmission is **not** the main way the virus spreads.

Tips:

- Practice strict social distancing from other people by maintaining a distance of **six feet or more** from others.
- Wipe down the handle of your shopping cart or basket with a disinfectant wipe.
- Go alone, and if possible, without children who love touching things.
- Plot your route through the store before you go; you'll spend less time at the store.
- Take a paper list so your phone can remain in your pocket - your phone likely touches your face often.
- Limit your shopping trips to once every week or every two weeks; consider curbside pick-up and delivery if available where you live.
- Shop at off-peak times. But check if stores near you are limiting the number of shoppers inside at once, or enforcing special shopping hours for essential employees or elderly.
- Individuals aged 60 and over and those in high-risk groups should seek assistance with shopping. (See below for more information.)

“What are the best ways to practice social distancing at the store?”

Try to maintain a distance of **at least six feet** from other people. If you see a crowded aisle, skip it or wait for people to leave.



“Should I wear a mask to the store?”

Yes. Due to new data about how COVID-19 spreads, along with evidence of widespread COVID-19 illness in communities across the country, CDC recommends that people wear a cloth face covering to cover their nose and mouth in the community setting. This is to protect people around you if you are infected but do not have symptoms.

Given the current shortages of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), surgical masks and N95 respirators should probably be reserved for medical workers since they are at a much higher risk of being infected. A mask, scarf, or other cloth barrier will help inhibit droplet spread from your coughs or sneezes, and will also help keep you from touching your face. You can use a bandana or homemade mask over your face. Cloth masks should be routinely washed.

“Should I wear gloves to the store?”

Probably not necessary. You should be sure to wash your hands thoroughly before and after your grocery store visit. Washing your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds is the best way to disinfect. If you do wear gloves, be extra cautious to take them off without touching the outside with your bare hands. Then wash your hands thoroughly.

“What if I am in a high-risk group or over age 60?”

Check stores near you for special shopping hours reserved for high-risk groups or elderly. Individuals aged 60 and over and high-risk individuals should ask family members, friends, or neighbors to help out by picking up and delivering groceries. If you need help, contact Waukesha County’s Aging and Disability Resource Center for more information about services available at 262-548-7848. But if it’s you doing the shopping, follow the tips listed above.

“Is it safer for shoppers to get groceries via home delivery / pick-up?” Yes, it may be your best option because you will have contact with fewer people. However, demand may make delivery times scarce or later than you had anticipated. Be sure to plan ahead.

“Is it okay to bring reusable bags, or is it better to get single-use bags at the store and then throw them away after use?”

Reusable bags may keep you from touching carts or other bags that have been handled by someone else. Some businesses have banned use of reusable bags, so check with your grocery store in advance of your visit. After every use, it is recommended that reusable bags are washed. Nylon and cotton grocery bags can be machine-washed in cold water and air-dried. Non-washable bags can be wiped down or sprayed with disinfectant.

“What about checkout? Should I use cash or credit? Is self-checkout safer?”

Be sure to maintain a distance of **at least six feet** from other shoppers in line. If you are able to pay with a contactless option that limits touching the pin pad or handling cash, use that – but keep your phone in your pocket until checkout.

The self-checkout limits contact with staff, but requires touching areas that other people have touched. No matter what method you chose, use hand sanitizer or disinfecting wipes, and then wash your hands when you return home.



“Should I be sanitizing my groceries once they’re at my house?”

Probably not. According to the CDC, COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. The greatest grocery-related risk is contact with others with high-touch areas like shopping carts and basket handles, while transmission via food and food packaging is low. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

“Do I need to disinfect my fresh produce?”

No, just wash your produce well. COVID-19 is unlikely to be passed on through fresh produce. Even if the virus did survive on your fresh produce, it is likely to end up in the stomach where the low pH environment will inactivate and kill the virus.

Do not use soap or detergent to wash fresh produce. Soap is not designed for use on food and any of its residue on fresh produce can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea if ingested. The FDA recommends washing fresh fruits and vegetables in cold water. After handling your groceries and fresh produce, wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds or use a sanitizer.

“If I eat food with coronavirus on it, will I get sick from eating it?”

Probably not. These coronaviruses have poor survivability on surfaces, so there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at ambient, refrigerated, or frozen temperatures. Be sure to wash your produce well, and wash your hands for at least 20 seconds after handling packages and before eating .