



Australian Government

COVID-19 hygiene practices for supermarkets

This advice was prepared with the most up-to-date information at the time of publication (27 March 2020) and was updated on (16 April 2020) to reflect updated Department of Health advice on the effectiveness of non-alcohol based hand sanitisers. The advice is subject to the conditions of each state and territory or the latest advice provided by the Australian Government Department of Health.

Supermarkets are essential services. To prevent the spread of COVID-19 in supermarkets, here are hygiene practices recommended by the Australian Government based on information from the World Health Organization and Australian Government Department of Health.

Care for yourself and others

We must all show care, compassion and respect to each other during this difficult time.

The outbreak of COVID-19 will affect all people, in varying ways, and it is normal to feel afraid, worried and/or overwhelmed by the changing alerts and media coverage on the spread of the virus.

- If you are concerned about COVID-19, symptoms or need advice, call the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 **020 080**, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- If you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed you can call Lifeline **13 11 14**.
- If you see anti-social behaviour in store, contact your **local police**. They are prioritising responses to supermarkets.

COVID-19 symptoms

You and your staff should not come to work if you have any of the following symptoms:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- fatigue or tiredness
- shortness of breath.

If unwell, contact your doctor, who can liaise with local public health authorities to determine when it is safe for you to return to work.

How does the virus spread?

COVID-19 is most likely spread from person to person through:

- direct contact with a person while they are infectious
- contact with droplets when a person with the virus coughs or sneezes

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- touching objects or surfaces that are contaminated by droplets coughed or sneezed from a person with the virus.

You and your staff should take appropriate health precautions, given the large number of people with whom you will come into contact in a supermarket.

Personal hygiene practices

Avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose at all times.¹

Social distancing

Social distancing is important because COVID-19 is most likely to spread through close contact with a person who has the virus.

You are unlikely to be infected if you follow social distancing advice:

- limit face-to-face interactions to less than 15 minutes
- limit close proximity interactions (less than 1.5 metres between people) to 2 hours
- where possible, maintain a distance of 1.5 metres between people²
 - To protect staff working in close proximity for prolonged periods, for instance two staff working in back-to-back checkouts, you may consider rotating staff or installing a physical barrier between them (e.g. a Perspex screen). Screens are not necessary between staff and customers as the interaction period is shorter.

Supermarkets and grocery shopping are regarded as essential activities. The Australian Government advises these places of essential gathering must apply social distancing and good hygiene practices, including:

- being able to maintain a distancing of 1.5 meters between people
- providing hand hygiene products and suitable rubbish bins, with frequent cleaning (particularly of high touch surfaces) and waste disposal

Supermarkets may choose to use the 4 square metre rule as a guide when defining store limits, but are not bound to this measure. Many supermarkets have adopted a voluntary, nationally consistent, industry-led approach to limiting the number of customers in stores to keep their staff and customers safe.

Hand washing and hand rub

All staff should regularly wash their hands. Hand washing should take 20–30 seconds. Wash the entirety of your hands (palms, fingers, nails and back of your hands)—cover all areas with soap prior to washing them with warm water.

If hand washing is not practical, alcohol-based hand rub with more than 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol (also known as hand sanitiser) is the recommended form of hand hygiene.³ You should use the same procedure to rub your hands with sanitiser for 20-30 seconds. Alcohol-free hand rubs have not been shown to be effective against COVID-19 and experts recommend against using them.⁴

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

² https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-drivers-and-passengers-using-public-transport_1.pdf

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/hcp-hand-sanitizer.html>,

⁴ <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others-from-coronavirus-covid-19/good-hygiene-for-coronavirus-covid-19>

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Cash, bag and object handling

The risk of infection from touching surfaces, objects and cash is extremely **low** and will only occur when someone touches their face especially eyes, nose or mouth after handling objects that have cough or sneeze droplets from an infected person.

Where possible, you should encourage customers to pay for their shopping electronically, including contactless or tap-and-go payments.

Personal protective equipment

Gloves

Washing hands regularly or using alcohol-based hand rub will offer more protection against COVID-19 than wearing gloves.

If you are feeling well, there is **no need** to wear gloves, other than in line with usual supermarket practice (such as food handling, deli).

Wearing gloves can lead to complacency and reduced hand washing, potentially increasing the risk of contracting the virus.

Masks

If you are feeling well, there is **no need** to wear a protective mask, as there is little evidence to support use of in healthy people to prevent transmission of viruses

Masks are only useful for people who are sick, so that they do not cough on others, and for health care workers who have frequent, prolonged close contact with sick people.

If you choose to wear a mask, it will only be effective when used in combination with frequent hand cleaning with or soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub. ⁵

Store hygiene

Customers entering the store

When entering the supermarket, customers should be given antibacterial wipes and/or hand sanitiser for personal use, and antibacterial wipes for use on their trolley and/or basket.

Sneeze guards

There is no recommendation from health authorities that a physical barrier, outside of a health care environment, is effective in preventing the spread of COVID-19. The best control is to supervise food fixtures and remove contaminated products from sale.

If a customer is spreading droplets (sneezing, coughing or vomiting) at the check-out, clean surfaces with appropriate disinfectant and single use cloth or wipe. Dispose of used cleaning materials appropriately.

Cleaning supermarkets

The risk of infection from touching surfaces, objects and cash is extremely **low** and will only occur when someone touches their face, especially eyes, nose and mouth after handling objects that have cough or sneeze droplets from an infected person.

⁵ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

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If you think a surface may be infected, clean it with simple disinfectant to kill the virus and protect yourself and others. Clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.

You should have a regular cleaning regime for all 'high touch' surfaces and a daily clean of all 'low touch areas'.

Thoroughly clean environmental surfaces with water and detergent and apply commonly used hospital-level disinfectants (such as sodium hypochlorite).⁶

Disinfecting individual workspaces

You should use standard cleaning practices at the end of each shift, taking into consideration how often the surfaces are touched.

Touch screens that are high contact areas (including self-serve checkouts) should be regularly disinfected with wipes.

If wipes are not available at the self-serve checkouts, customers and staff should have access to hand sanitiser prior to, and after, using the touch screens.

Feeling unwell when at work

You must not come to work if you have any of the symptoms: fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue or tiredness and shortness of breath.

If you or your staff begin to develop symptoms while at work, you must:

- isolate yourself from others
- practice good hand hygiene
- inform your manager, and call a doctor or hospital and tell them your recent travel or close contact history.

If you have serious symptoms such as difficulty breathing:

- call 000, ask for an ambulance and notify the officers of your recent travel or close contact history.

Confirmed cases of COVID-19

Where a team member has a confirmed case of COVID 19, public health officials will determine if any other team members need to self-isolate based on the period in which the confirmed individual would have been infectious. A manager can pass on information to state or territory health departments, who will advise if close contact team members need to self-isolate.

If no close contacts are identified, all other staff members should be given information on COVID-19, but can continue their usual work duties.

There is **no requirement** to close a store if a staff member tests positive for COVID-19.

There is **no need** for specialised additional cleaning in a store with a confirmed case of COVID-19, beyond this advice.

In the event of a confirmed case in a supermarket, the store manager may choose to undertake a general clean, in line with this advice.

⁶ WHO- Infection prevention and control during health care when COVID-19 is suspected: Interim guidance.

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