



Tips for Staying Safe During COVID-19

Grocery Shopping and Take-out Food

(May 2020)

When shopping for food in grocery stores, having groceries delivered, or ordering take-out, many people are experiencing understandable anxiety about potential risk of exposure to the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

The Cambridge Public Health Department would like to share the most current information available about how the virus is believed to spread, potential sources of contamination, and actions you can take to stay safe when buying groceries or getting take-out food.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts [requires](#) everyone over the age of two to wear a mask at all times when in public, including visiting a grocery store or restaurant to pick up food.

Understanding How the Coronavirus Spreads

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Symptoms often include cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) for several minutes
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. These droplets can be inhaled in the mouth or nose—or possibly into the lungs.

Because the coronaviruses do not live long on surfaces, there is likely very low risk of spread from food products or packaging that are shipped over a period of days or weeks at room temperature, refrigerated or frozen temperatures, according to the CDC.

Additionally, **there is no evidence to support transmission of COVID-19 associated with food**, according to the CDC, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Buying Groceries in a Store or Picking up Pre-Bagged Groceries

When you go Shopping

- Check to see if the market offers on-line ordering and/or delivery. This is the best way to minimize exposure.

- If you are picking up a few essential grocery items from a take-out restaurant (an option now allowed in Cambridge) you should order ahead of time and the groceries should be bagged and ready for pick-up, just like take-out.
- When shopping at a store, prepare a shopping list in advance. To limit trips to the store, buy 1 to 2 weeks of groceries at a time. Do not buy more than you need, which can create unnecessary demand and temporary shortages.
- Wear a face covering or mask at all times while you are in the store and public spaces, like walkways and parking areas.
- Carry your own wipes, or use one provided by the store to wipe down the handles of the shopping cart or basket.
- Practice physical (social) distancing while shopping or picking up pre-bagged groceries. Keep at least 6 feet between you, other shoppers, and store employees. Do not touch your face.
- Do not bring your own bags; reusable shopping bags are currently not allowed in Massachusetts to prevent the spread of disease. Stores are now providing bags free of charge.
- When you pick up food or groceries, use precautions. Between public locations, sanitize hands before touching car-door handles, trunk latch, steering wheels, bike handles, etc, as soon as possible after touching any public surface. Periodically clean these surfaces.

When you arrive home with groceries

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds when you return home and again after you put away your groceries. Put the shopping bags in your trash or recycling.
- There is no strong evidence of food packaging being associated with the transmission of COVID-19. The inner contents of sealed containers are unlikely to be contaminated.
 - If the virus is present on the surface of groceries, it will become inactive after 24 hours, and cannot make you sick, so groceries can be put away when you arrive home for later use.
 - If you wish, as an extra precaution, you can wipe down non-porous containers, like glass or cans, with disinfectant wipes and let air dry, particularly if you are going to use them right away.
- Unpack groceries as you would normally. Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry, eggs, seafood, and other perishables—like berries, lettuce, herbs, and mushrooms—within 2 hours of purchasing.
- Wash hands and disinfect counters after putting away groceries. Always disinfect high touch areas such as door knobs and refrigerator/cabinet handles as part of your daily routine.
- To clean and sanitize kitchen counters use a commercially available disinfectant product or a homemade sanitizing solution with 4 teaspoons of bleach per quart of water. **WARNING:** Do not use this solution or other disinfecting products on food or packaging where it can soak through.

Getting Your Groceries Delivered

- When getting groceries delivered from a supermarket, order and pre-pay online or over the phone, including a tip, so that you do not need to swipe your credit card, sign a receipt in person, or hand over cash. Put groceries away as described above.

- When you receive packaged food in a box from an online warehouse (ex: Amazon) the risk is low. If you want to be cautious, put the box aside for 24 hours. Wash hands after handling the box, removing food from the box, and discarding it.
- According to the FDA, there is no evidence to suggest that food produced in the United States or imported from countries affected by COVID-19 can transmit COVID-19.

Getting Take-out or Delivery from Restaurants

- When getting take-out food, order and pre-pay online or over the phone, including a tip, so that you do not need to swipe your credit card, sign a receipt in person, or hand over cash. Use curbside or home delivery service to avoid going into the food establishment.
- Before eating your take-out food, transfer the food to your own plates/bowls without touching it with your hands. Discard the take-out containers and packaging, and wash your hands before touching the plate or eating the food.

