

Food safety during grocery shopping

Practicing safe food practices is important while shopping for healthy foods for you and your family. Currently, there is no evidence to support that COVID-19 is transmitted through food, and current research shows the risk of viruses being transferred to food packaging is very low. The greatest risk of contracting the virus is from people who are ill. Remember, experts think the virus is primarily spread from person-to-person contact, so maintain a 6-foot distance from other people and limit contact with others as you shop.

Many grocery stores have added extra cleaning steps to help keep stores clean. Many are offering sanitizing wipes at the door. Use them to wipe your hands and the handle of your shopping cart. If you choose to wear single-use gloves or a mask, this is the time to put them on – after sanitizing your hands.

Before shopping, make a list of any grocery items or supplies you need. You should group these by where they are in the store. Start with nonperishables first, such as canned or paper goods, cereals or dried items, and cleaning supplies. These are usually located in the center aisles, with perishable items on the outside aisles. Plan on picking up deli and refrigerated items last.

Purchase only the amount you need for a week, and if you are worried about supply of certain foods or products, buy a two-week supply. Since most manufacturers are keeping up with demand, there is no need to stockpile. According to market research firm IRI, a two-person household would need approximately nine double rolls or five mega rolls of toilet paper to last about two weeks. So that 12-pack of mega rolls you bought last week should last more than a month. If you are picking up prescriptions from within the store, do not wait in line unless you can maintain the 6-foot social spacing. Place your prescriptions in a safe place in your cart or purse.

If you are not wearing gloves, use plastic bags to select your produce and then keep them in the bag. Inspect all food packages for tears and damaged seals, and avoid buying deeply dented cans. Make sure refrigerated foods feel cold and frozen foods feel solid and are not dripping. Raw meat, poultry, and seafood should also be placed in plastic bags to keep them from dripping on your ready-to-eat foods, such as bread or produce, and should be placed away from these items. Check “use by” or “best buy” dates to make sure you are getting the freshest container.

Now that you have finished your grocery shopping, make sure items are bagged by similarities. This will keep items from possible cross contamination or being smashed by larger items. It will also be easier and faster to put your groceries away when you get home. Discard your gloves and grab another sanitizing wipe on the way out to use before getting in your car.

At home, wash and sanitize your hands before promptly storing groceries where they need to go. Your refrigerator should be registering 41 degrees F or below, and your freezer should be 32 degrees F or below. Any hot foods should be registering 135 degrees F or above, and if you are going to reheat them later, reheat them to 165 degrees F to follow safe food practices. Having the right thermometer can help you determine these temperatures.

Now, take a sanitizing wipe to your car steering wheel, doorknobs, phone, and anything else you may have touched from the grocery store. Then, go wash your hands again!

References:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coronavirus (COVID-19), www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov
- Eat Right, Food Shopping Safety Guidelines, <https://www.eatright.org/food/planning-and-prep/smart-shopping/food-shopping-safety-guidelines>
- Drew Weiholtz, How Much Toilet Paper Does a Family of 4 Need for 2 Weeks?, <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/coronavirus/how-much-toilet-paper-does-a-family-of-4-need-for-2-weeks/2331319>

Source:

Sandra Bastin, Ph.D., R.D.N., L.D.