

A COVID-19 GROCERY GUIDE

We all have to eat. Use this guide to help maximize your shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The situation is constantly evolving. Always follow current recommendations from the [CDC](#) and the [New Mexico Department of Health](#). It's also worth noting that even when local infections taper off, we will still need to be vigilant to prevent further spread. Continuing these practices into the future may be helpful in that regard.



Should I shop if I am sick?

No. Stay home if you are sick or have [symptoms of COVID-19](#), including fever, cough, or shortness of breath. You should also stay home if you have been instructed to isolate by a healthcare worker.

If you are sick and need food, you have many options. Use a delivery service, call a friend, family member, or neighbor. Have the deliveries left outside your door to reduce the chance of transmission.

Absolutely do not shop if you feel unwell.

How often should I shop?

Shop as infrequently as possible. Many experts are recommending no more than once every one to two weeks.

The actual time between shopping trips will be different for everyone. Consider your storage space, dietary needs, and family size. Adjust where possible to enable you to shop as infrequently as possible.

What should I do to prepare for my shopping trip?

- Decide if you must go. If you are sick, stay home. If you have sufficient food already, wait.
- Make a shopping list. Think one to two weeks into the future. Include alternate choices for items that may be out of stock.
- Consider [meal planning](#) to help fine-tune your shopping list, save money, and reduce food waste.
- Double check your shopping list. Check with everyone in the family; this will help be sure you can go as long as possible between trips.
- Use a paper shopping list, not your phone; this will help prevent contaminating your phone and bringing the virus home.
- Take your face mask and hand sanitizer.
- Leave your reusable bags at home.
- If possible, select off-peak hours.

- Pre-plan your route through the store to be as efficient as possible.
- If delivery or curbside pickup is available, consider using those and skipping the trip entirely.

What are some best practices while I am shopping?

- Maintain [social distancing](#). Stay 6 feet away from others.
- Be kind to the checker and other grocery store employees. Step back to provide them 6 feet of distance.
- Put your mask on before leaving home or before exiting your car.
- Have hand sanitizer in your pocket so you can clean your hands as needed.
- Do not touch your face. If you must adjust your mask, clean your hands with hand sanitizer first.
- Clean your cart before using it, or use a cart pre-cleaned by employees.
- Follow all instructions from grocery store employees. They are there to help keep everyone safe. Rules may have changed since you last visited.
- Be patient if you must wait in line.
- Be kind to other shoppers. They are experiencing the same challenges as you.
- Resist the temptation to hoard food. Stress can cause us to want to buy more than we need. Be mindful of your emotions and honest about how much food you require.
- Thank every grocery worker you interact with (from a distance). Their hard work is what allows you to continue getting food.

What can I do after my shopping trip?

- Use hand sanitizer before getting in your car. Wash your hands when you get home.
- Pause before driving off. Shopping is probably more stressful than normal. Take a moment to refocus so you can avoid distractions and stay safe while driving home.
- Clean and disinfect your counters after putting food away.
- Rotate the food in your house so that you are eating the oldest items first. If you have been stocking up, it may be easy to lose track of this. Rotating helps reduce food waste and avoid foodborne illness.

Where should I shop?

Continue to use your regular grocery store; this will help your shopping feel as normal as possible, and you'll know where to find your favorite items. Shopping may be a little disorienting right now, so familiarity will help.

However, recognize that each store is having its own challenges maintaining stock. Over time, you might experiment with alternate stores. Some may have better stock of high-demand items like frozen foods, eggs, dairy, or vegetarian options.

Should I use delivery or curbside pickup?

Yes. These options are a great choice to reduce exposure. However, be aware that these are limited resources and probably best used by the most vulnerable in our community or those who are sick. Be thoughtful about whether this is the right choice for you.

Most local grocery stores have delivery and/or curbside pickup available. Check the store's website for more details.

What if I need help or cannot afford the food I need?

New Mexico has resources to help. Visit the [State of New Mexico Assistance](#) site to find options. UNM students have access the [Lobo Food Pantry](#). Help is often available if you ask.

Is there a best time to shop?

If you are over 60, consider using [special store hours](#). Most stores are reserving the first hour of the day for those at increased risk.

Ideally, shopping on off-peak hours is best. Grocery stores are [limiting occupancy](#). Choosing off-peak times will reduce waiting outside and help you get the food you want.

How do you know what the off-peak hours are? You can call the store and ask. Or try Google – search for the store and check out the [popular times](#) feature. Note that the historical trends will not apply, but may still help you identify less busy times.

Also, consider when the store stocks its shelves. If stocking is done in the morning, and you shop in the evening, you are less likely to find the items you want. Many stores are stocking outside of regular hours. Simply ask a store employee (or call) to find out.



Should I shop alone?

Select one person in your household to do the shopping and other errands; this will help reduce the exposure risk to you and your whole family.

Shopping in pairs or groups may seem to give an advantage – selfishly, you can skirt purchase limits on select items, you can shop faster, and it may feel less stressful to have a buddy.

However, this increases your exposure risk and, if you over-purchase, may result in more limited food for others in the community.

Shop alone. Avoid the temptation to shop in pairs or groups.

Can I touch the cart?

As stores are limiting occupancy, many are also pre-cleaning carts. If your store is not cleaning carts, use hand wipes to clean the cart handle. Note that while many stores are cleaning handles, most are not cleaning the entire cart between customers. As such, you should still be mindful of what you touch and use hand sanitizer periodically.

Most experts [do not recommend wearing gloves](#) to the grocery store. Gloves get dirty just like your hands. For most of us, the best practice is to be mindful of what we touch, practice social distancing, use hand sanitizer, avoid touching our face, and wash our hands as soon as we can after shopping.

Can I touch the food?

You will at least have to touch the products that you purchase! However, infected surfaces can pass the virus.

So, for everyone's benefit, please only touch the things that you plan to buy. You may still touch fruit and vegetables to determine what is ripe; just practice proper hand hygiene (using sanitizer frequently, avoid touching your face, and washing hands once home).



What staples should I buy?

In general, you don't need to purchase anything out of the ordinary. The FDA notes that there is [no nationwide shortage of food](#). So, you can select the foods you normally eat. But if you purchase more than normal, consider the shelf-life of your items. It may also be advantageous to select items that last longer to help you reduce your shopping frequency.

Here is a good summary of [foods that last a long time](#) and provide well-rounded nutrition. But be mindful to select foods that you *will* eat. Panic-buying can lead us to purchase things we don't actually like or need, so make a list to help guide you.

Also, [use MyPlate to help balance your overall nutrition](#) and inform your purchasing decisions.

Should I wash my food when I get it home? Should I quarantine it in the garage?

Most experts believe that the [risk of getting infected from groceries](#) is fairly low. Remember, close interaction with other people is the bigger risk. You generally do not need to clean your groceries. You should still rinse fresh fruit and vegetables the same as usual. If you do choose to wash your groceries, stick to soap and water. Your disinfectant wipes and sprays are not meant for food.

Similarly, you do not need to quarantine food in the garage. Doing so may actually create the risk of foodborne illness. Bring your food inside and store it the same as you normally would, temperature controlling appropriately.

What if the store is out of my favorite items?

Frozen and canned foods, eggs, dairy products, paper products, and more may be in short supply. It is important to note that this is not a food shortage, but a supply chain issue, currently.

If you are unable to purchase what you want, you can try another store, but it's best to wait another week, if possible, to limit your exposure. A better approach is to pre-plan alternatives. Before you shop, consider alternate options for each item on your list, so you are prepared and don't feel pressured to make a hurried choice in the store.

Should I use reusable bags?

This decision is actually being made for you. Most (if not all) stores are temporarily prohibiting the use of reusable bags.

Can the store bags transmit the virus to my house?

It's possible but unlikely that you would contract the virus from your grocery bags. Most experts say that the bigger risk is standing close to someone else. That being said, you might consider setting your bags on the floor instead of the counter. Another option is setting the bags down at the door and emptying the food from there.

And since you may not be able to use your reusable bags, please still recycle clean paper bags with regular recycling and save your plastic bags to return to an in-store recycling center (but maybe wait to do this until later).

How should I pay?

The [CDC recommends using touchless payment](#), if possible (examples include contactless credit cards, Apple Pay, or Google Pay). If you must handle cash, a card, or use a keypad, be sure to use hand sanitizer immediately after paying. Many stores have sanitizer available at the checkout for this purpose.

What if I have to take public transportation to go grocery shopping?

The buses are still running but on a reduced schedule. [Check the transit website](#) to plan your trip. You may be limited in the amount of groceries you can purchase at once simply because you'll have to carry it all.

Consider using a personal grocery basket or backpack. Also, you will need to be vigilant about hygiene while on the bus. Wear your mask, sit 6 feet away from others, and have hand sanitizer with you.

Can I grow my own food?

Yes! Gardening is a great way to supplement your food supply. There are many [online resources](#) to help you get started. You can order supplies online to avoid a trip to the store. But recognize that you can only grow items supported by your space and the climate (sorry, but you probably won't be able to grow bananas).

Also, unless you live on a ranch, expect that you can only grow fruit and vegetables and that the majority of your food will still come from the store.

Who can help me if I have more questions?

If you still have questions, Employee Wellness can help direct you to additional resources. Please contact us at wellness@unm.edu.

