

Nurse-scientist warns against reliance on gloves against coronavirus

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Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing infection prevention and control expert says untrained store workers unaware of easy transfer of germs including viruses, bacteria

Shanina Knighton, a nurse-scientist/researcher at the Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing who helped get the word out about proper hand hygiene and the relative effectiveness of face masks during the course of the COVID-19 outbreak says there's another critical issue: Workers at [grocery stores](#) and elsewhere are often untrained and likely unaware of how readily viruses and bacteria can be transferred from one surface to another.

"While authorities are doing a lot to 'flatten the curve' of the spread of the [coronavirus](#), the places so many people are still going to are a real hot spot for the spread of the virus, even though workers are now wearing [gloves](#)," Knighton said. "The big problem is that employees are not being properly trained on infection prevention and control in part because guidelines don't exist.

"So those workers are constantly touching food, people's money, people's hand, carts and touch screens—without cleaning their hands or changing their gloves. But we know that the gloves can carry a bioburden and increases the risk for transfer of germs."

Knighton in late February did a [10-part Twitter thread on hand hygiene](#). She has also published multiple studies including her present work studying the movement of bacteria across various surfaces and patients' [hand](#) hygiene practices in hospital emergency departments (which she can talk about in a general way because her work is not yet published or complete).

She said she has reached out to local and state authorities to open up a dialogue about helping workers at these necessarily open establishments get the needed training that would mirror the efforts of well-trained [health care workers](#) on the front lines of the pandemic.

"Because this is the front line—we're all on the front line," Knighton

said. "But some of the shoppers at grocery stores still think we're in normal times as they pick through the apples and grapes and then later touch their face or someone else. Workers are also going to need to be trained to spend more time following after to clean surfaces that we all are touching; and we need to be trained to not do that."

Not only that, she said, but shoppers should be wiping down their purchased goods when they return home, as most research says the COVID-19 virus can live at least nine hours on surfaces, possibly much longer.

Knighton said health care workers know to wash their hands before and after putting gloves on—and to dispose of them often.

"The science is that these gloves are actually porous," she said, referring to the common latex surgical gloves used by health care workers. "So many people think that these gloves protect completely, but they really don't. You can easily pick up germs that stay on the gloves and which you transfer to another surface—and the bacteria and viruses can actually go through onto your hands."

Knighton said while social distancing is important to help stem the outbreak, the protective measures she's recommending—regarding [infection-prevention](#) standards and practices at places where people have no choice but to be close to each other—is just as essential.

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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