

Mission possible: Tips for safe grocery shopping during the pandemic

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(HealthDay)—The coronavirus pandemic has turned grocery shopping

into a mission filled with anxiety, but a food science expert's advice can make it a safe one.

The first thing to consider is whether you should go to the store at all, said Donald Schaffner. He's a professor in the department of food science in the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J.

In fact, U.S. coronavirus task force coordinator Dr. Deborah Birx issued stark advice about the coming week to Americans on Sunday: "This is the moment to not be going to the grocery store, not going to the pharmacy, but doing everything you can to keep your family and your friends safe," she stressed.

Instead, people at high risk for [severe illness](#) from COVID-19—[older adults](#) and people of any age with serious underlying [medical conditions](#)—should probably use a [shopping service](#) or having a family member or neighbor do their shopping if they're in need, Schaffner said in a Rutgers news release.

If someone outside your household does your shopping, maintain recommended social distancing when receiving your order. Ask delivery services to leave purchases at your door and ring the bell.

"For people going to [grocery stores](#), many are offering [hand sanitizers](#) at the entrance and are offering to sanitize grocery carts," Schaffner said. "I think these are two great ideas, and customers should take advantage of both of them."

Schaffner said it's important to make a list so you can move through the store quickly. While you shop, do your best to keep six feet away from other people. If hand sanitizer is available, use it when you leave the store and again after you put your items in the car.

If you use reusable grocery bags, clean them after each use.

What should you do once your groceries are in your home?

Use a disinfecting wipe to rub down surfaces where purchased items sat before you put them away. Wash your hands after you have finished stowing everything, Schaffner added.

"If you are concerned about the outside of food packages being contaminated, I suggest that you wash your hands or sanitize your hands before you sit down to eat any food that you might've taken out of those containers," he advised.

He said soap should "absolutely not" be used to wash food. It can cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhea if ingested. Experts, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and U.S. Department of Agriculture, recommend washing produce in cold water.

More information: Consumer Reports offers more [grocery shopping advice](#).

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