
Retail: Practical advice for social distancing during Covid-19

Owen Clifford, head of Retail Sector at Bank of Ireland, offers practical advice for grocery and convenience stores on social distancing during the Covid-19/Coronavirus pandemic.

The provision of a safe, hygienic grocery shopping environment is imperative in these unprecedented times.

Grocery/Convenience store owners and their staff are working resiliently to meet the requirements of the Irish consumer whilst observing Government/[HSE guidelines](#) on containment/delay of Covid19.

Some guidance is outlined below based on best-practice observed globally in response to Covid-19 related social distancing provisions.

The following is in no way a finite list and all grocery/convenience retailers should be engaging with their principal wholesaler, HR adviser and health and safety /food safety consultant to ensure that best practice is delivered, and staff/customers protected in a robust manner.

All retailers need to continually and proactively ensure that they are operating fully in accordance with Government and HSE requirements in a dynamic, fluid, challenging environment for their customers, staff and communities.

Social distancing/hygiene practices

- Clear signage informing customers of the need to maintain social distancing should be placed all around the store. Provision of hand sanitiser/hygiene tools for customers at entrance/exit/checkouts etc.
- At the checkouts and counters signage should clearly show the distance required for social distancing. Checkout supervisors and store management should support execution of social distancing in a firm but caring manner.
- All customer seating areas and additional services, such as photos booths/children's play areas etc should be closed.
- All customer facing areas of the store must be cleaned on a regular basis. This includes areas such as checkouts, counters, ATM's, trolleys, coffee machines etc. Self-scan checkouts should be thoroughly cleaned after each customer.
- All staff made fully aware of the strict HSE guidelines around hand washing, coughing/sneezing etc.

Store capacity/preferential treatment of elderly/vulnerable customers

- A reasonable number of customers to be allowed in the store at any one time – assess if necessary to put limitations on access (especially during busier periods). Manage entrance and exit doors appropriately. Ensure that Government guidelines re internal gatherings are maintained at a minimum (not appropriate for all given store size differentiation).
- Clear signage re maximum capacity (store size dependant), preferred method of payment (card/contactless), quotas on certain products, preferential opening hours for vulnerable/elderly customers
- It would be appropriate/good practice to have a dedicated checkout (if possible) for elderly customers.
- Proactively contact elderly/vulnerable customers – check if their order can be take over the phone and delivered.

Staff welfare/business continuity

- Ensure that social distancing of two metres is made possible and is adhered to in-store. Clear guidelines displayed in-store and especially within staff break-out areas.
- Encourage customers to use the self- scan checkouts as much as possible.
- Encourage customers to use contactless payment, or debit/credit card transactions and to insert/remove the card themselves.
- All areas should be properly serviced and sanitised regularly – each till having dedicated hand sanitiser/towel available.
- Appropriate Staff rostering provisions are key - ensure people are kept on the same team to avoid crossover of staff – reducing the risk of cross contamination.
- Support key members of staff having remote access to all critical store data and information – remote access/mobile app's updated etc. Experienced staff rostered for critical times to ensure that key activities such as daily product ordering/store replenishment activities completed timely and accurately.
- Ensure staff are fully aware of the procedures to comply with if they feel unwell/are worried re Covid-19.

Owen Clifford is sector head of [Retail Convenience](#) at Bank of Ireland and is responsible for the continuing development of the Bank's growth strategy in this area and has actively supported leading retailers and stakeholders in the sector to grow and develop their business in a sustainable manner.

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