

Keeping shops safe for workers and customers

by Indian Scientists Response to Covid

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Essential service shops, like grocery stores and pharmacies, have been allowed to remain open during the lockdown announced to tackle COVID-19. Since these are also places that many people access, they are possible hotspots for the spread of the disease. While it is important to follow the general practices of washing hands, maintaining physical distance and keeping surfaces clean, there are some specific measures that you, as an essential service worker, need to take. These measures can help keep you, your colleagues and your families stay safe and healthy, while still continuing to provide the public with essentials.

General guidelines for shopkeepers

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the suggested guidelines of washing hands regularly and keeping your hands away from your face, are applicable to everyone. These measures should be followed strictly by all workers in the shop. While interacting with customers, it is also recommended that you wear a mask. Some people also choose to wear aprons, caps and gloves to be extra cautious. If you are selling loose, unpacked foods, such as in a ration shop, consider using simple devices such as a large plastic tube, bent for convenient delivery. This will ensure appropriate physical distancing between you and your customers.

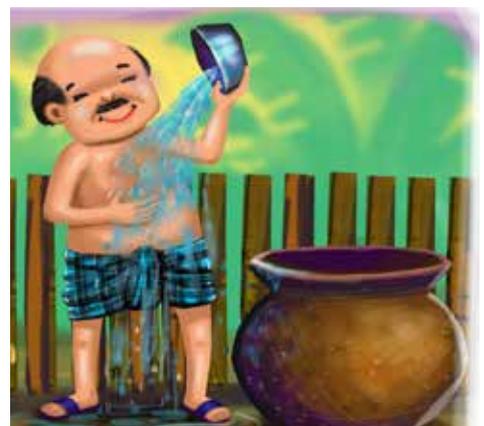
If you are sick

If you or others working in the shop show any symptoms of COVID-19, such as a cough or fever, they should take leave and stay at home. Ideally, employers should give these workers leave with pay. This will ensure that the workers recover and, importantly, do not pass on the infection to other workers and customers.

Personal / household hygiene

You should try to take a soap bath as soon as you get home so as not to transfer any viruses that may have landed on you during the day onto your family. Leave the clothes you wore through the day in a separate, designated bucket. If possible, wash immediately with detergent and water.

Shopkeeper 1 of 4



Buying stock and taking deliveries

Everyone needs to practice the usual physical distancing guidelines while in public. Wholesale markets, from where shopkeepers source their supply, should also have a system for people to queue up to buy stock. It is advised to wear a mask when you are outside and wash your hands with soap when you come back. If possible, use online transactions for payments.



If you are receiving deliveries of stock, it is best if the goods are received outside the shop where you can then unpack boxes/ crates carefully before you bring the items in. If you can, wipe down the box (especially around the portion where you will open it) with a cloth dipped in soapy water.



Storage of material

Keep all unpackaged goods like rice and dal in covered containers. Wipe down these containers at the end of the day with a soapy cloth. Packaged goods like bottles and boxes can be kept on shelves: they will usually come from closed boxes that have not been handled recently, so there is a smaller risk of viruses on it. Fruits and vegetables can be kept openly too since typically, these sorts of perishables are on the shelf for a short amount of time. It is anyway recommended that people wash fruits and vegetables (as well as outer packaging of other items) thoroughly before storage when they get home. Generally, explain to customers that they should touch only what they want to buy, in order to minimize chances of spreading the virus.

Selling goods

Everyone is required to wear a reusable cloth mask or a face cover with more than one layer while going outside. It is important for the shopkeepers to be polite yet firm in their instructions to customers on wearing face covers or masks. You can print out posters from our website to display at the entrance of your shops to inform people about face covers and why they need to wear them.

Based on the size of your shop, you could follow one of these options

Option 1: (for smaller indoor shops)

You can serve customers at or near the entrance. Encourage your customers to come with lists so that you can serve them quickly and efficiently.



Option 2: (for larger indoor shops)

Ask all persons entering the shop to clean their hands. Have a washbasin with soap at the entrance, if possible. Try to also provide paper napkins for customers to dry their hands, and collect the napkins securely in a separate dustbin. Alternatively, an alcohol based hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) can be placed near the entrance for use by customers. If possible, leave the doors open, so that customers do not need to touch handles or door knobs to enter/exit the shop. You can also leave the windows open for better ventilation.

You may want to restrict the number of customers you allow into the shop at a time. This number will depend on how big your shop is and how many customers can be inside the shop while maintaining 1-2 m physical distance.

Option 3: (outdoor / wholesale markets)

Outdoor and wholesale markets usually have fewer surfaces on which viruses can land and be passed on from. You should still maintain the standard 1-2 m physical distance from others in or around your shops. In general, it is a good hygienic practice to ensure that your surroundings are clean and free of waste. Collect all waste in a container throughout the day and dispose of it at the appropriate place at the end of the day.

Queues

There may be some waiting time involved for the customers before they are served. Please request them to observe proper physical distance while they are in the queue. You can help them by drawing out circles at least 1-2 m apart on the pavement or road outside the shop.

At the end of the day, use soapy water to clean all counters and other surfaces such as handles, lids, cash boxes etc. Don't forget to clean other frequently-touched surfaces, like taps, door handles, door locks and flush buttons with soapy water. Clean wash basins and toilets daily with soap and water and disinfect with 1% bleach a few times during the day.

Wash reusable caps, masks and aprons with detergent, separately from other clothes. Make sure all workers are provided with a fresh, clean set everyday. Any disposable masks, gloves, caps, aprons have to be discarded safely. First disinfect them using 1% household bleach and then either burn or bury them deep in the ground.

Payments

Since you probably have to handle a significant amount of currency notes and coins, you should take special precautions to ensure that these are not spreading the virus. Wash your hands with soap as often as possible. You can use gloves while handling currency but you must be careful not to touch any other surfaces while you have them on. You can also keep currency in a separate box and make sure you clean the box with soap and water at the end of each day. If possible, designate one person to only handle all monetary transactions. But make sure that this person does not touch any goods or surfaces in the shop. Encourage online or cashless transactions.

Home Deliveries

The goods should be delivered in a box or bag which can be placed outside the house, from where the customer can pick them up. If possible, do not enter the house where you are delivering items. You can use a small container or pouch for cash transactions, so that you only need to handle the notes or coins later, when you can wash your hands right after.



Summary

General guidelines for shopkeepers:

- Wash hands as often as you can
- Try not to touch your face
- Wear a mask
- Use soap water to clean all counters and other surfaces, handles, lids etc
- Wash reusable caps / masks / aprons with detergent separately from other clothes
- If you are sick DO NOT WORK.
- Bathe with soap as soon as you get home
- Wash work clothes separately

Buying stock and taking deliveries:

- If possible, receive deliveries outside your shop
- Wipe boxes with soapy water
- Unpack boxes/crates
- Bring the items in

Storage of material:

- Store unpackaged goods, like rice and dal, in covered containers
- Wipe these containers at the end of the day
- It is fine to keep fruits and vegetables openly displayed

Selling goods:

- Smaller, indoor shops: serve customers at or near the entrance
- Larger, indoor shops: instruct customers to clean their hands before entering and restrict the number of customers
- Outdoor/wholesale shops: ask customers to maintain a distance of 1-2 m from each other
- Draw circles 1-2 m apart outside the shop for customers to queue in.

Payments:

- Keep currency notes and coins in a separate box that is cleaned daily with soap and water.
- Wash hands with soap after handling currency.
- If possible, designate one person to handle all monetary transactions, or encourage online transactions.

Home Deliveries:

- Try to not enter the customer's house but place deliveries outside
- Collect money using a box or pouch during deliveries
- Handle money when you can wash your hands right after



Every attempt has been made for scientific accuracy; in case any inaccuracies are found, please bring it to our notice at indscicov@gmail.com.

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