

MOVING BEYOND “STAY AT HOME”

Washington Retail – Open for Business Implementation Work Plan

The Washington Retail Association (WR) works on behalf of more than 4,000 storefronts from every corner of Washington State that serve their communities and create employment for more than 400,000 people.

During the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, Washington State (and most of the country) identified some retailers as “essential” and allowed them to remain open for business. However, thousands of department stores, small business and specialty retailers who are the lifeblood of their local communities and offer goods and services needed by Washington residents, are currently closed. The current reliance on the “essential business” designation is leading to significant upheaval and rapid, unintended consequences within the retail sector.

We have the unique opportunity to begin opening these closed retailers by learning from “best practices” that have evolved in retail settings open during the initial phase of the pandemic. Retailers across Washington State are looking for guidance and clear direction as they prepare for new processes, requirements, and restrictions in this rapidly evolving environment.

Our goals:

- Continue protecting citizens against the spread of COVID-19.
- Return employees to work as quickly as possible.
- Provide consumers with the broad range of products and services they are accustomed to.
- Transition away from essential and non-essential definitions to standards-based criteria that promote health and safety in all retailer settings.
- Promote safe shopping guidelines and best practices.

Our guiding principles:

- Return to work may be gradual, phased in and vary by location, business type and size.
- The plan must be adaptable to change based on emerging data and information on the effectiveness of protective measures.
- Retailers are not experts in public health; therefore, we must partner with state health authorities to ensure efforts align with the need to protect Washington residents.

Six Point Plan:

Washington Retail offers the following six-point plan. WR will convert these plan elements into a checklist to guide retail businesses as they develop their individual COVID safety plans. The following is offered in the spirit of initiating dialogue and a planning process to return main street retailers back to work. The plan elements include:

1. COVID-19 Health Screening
2. COVID -19 testing
3. Face Coverings and Equipment
4. Operational Practices and Social Distancing
5. Safe Shopping Guidelines
6. Implementation and Adaptive Management

1. COVID-19 Health Screening

A balance must be found related to screening of employees for symptoms of COVID-19 and protection of personal health information. Retailers must abide by federal HIPAA requirements to protect the privacy of employee health information.

At a minimum:

- Retail employees should be strongly encouraged to “self-screen and report.”
 - Retailers should provide their employees with publicly available information and guidance on symptoms.
- Retailers should require any employee who reports symptoms, or shows signs of infection, to refrain from coming to work and to self-quarantine.
- Retailers will strive to adhere to emerging guidance issued by the CDC.

2. COVID-19 Testing

Retailers are not the appropriate entities to administer or manage COVID –19 testing; however, retailers acknowledge that increased testing and data is vital for informing decision makers and businesses on future actions. Retailers recognize they can serve as a conduit of publicly available information from government health experts or local health authorities, including:

- Guidance on when testing for COVID-19 or antibodies is appropriate.
- Who is responsible for administering the tests, paying for the test and checking tests.
- When, and where, employees and customers can be tested by the appropriate officials.
- Any required documentation and notification of results (if positive).

Retailers will strive to make public information readily available to employees, customers, vendors and suppliers through signage or other materials. We encourage the State to develop standardized signage that retailers can download, print, and post.

3. Face Coverings and Equipment

Due to the need to ensure health care providers and first responders have access to medically approved personal protective equipment (mask, gowns, eye barriers, etc.), it is impossible to require employees, customers, vendors, or suppliers to wear “approved” PPE’s. WR also recognizes that Governor Inslee is considering further guidance on the use and availability of face coverings and equipment. Retailers will abide by any future direction by Governor Inslee. At a minimum,

- Since “approved” PPE’s are not readily available to all retailers, acknowledge that cloth face coverings and gloves are sufficient for the retail setting.
- Gloves may not be practical in all circumstances:
 - Sanitation practices and cleanliness can substitute in many instances.

4. Operational Practices and Social Distancing

The following operational practices will be considered in checklists used to develop individual business plans. Those plans should be tailored to protect employees, customers and suppliers for the individual business settings, including malls and shopping centers.

Sanitation

- Placement of notices that encourage hand hygiene at the entrance to the workplace and in other workplace areas where they are highly visible.
- Providing disinfectant and sanitation products for workers to clean their workspace, equipment, tools, and common areas.
- Placement of hand sanitizers at check-out counters and distributed throughout the retail business, storage areas, and administrative offices.
- Frequent sanitization of working surfaces, particularly check-out counters, electronic pin pads, and other areas contacted by customers and employees.
- Require hourly hand washing or sanitation by employees.
- Require employees to wash or sanitize their hands after each physical contact with a customer, vendor, or supplier.

Social Distancing

Specific measures will be tailored to the individual business, based on their size, retail products, and customer flow.

Employees

- Stagger shifts to limit the number of employees in the business at one time.
- Prohibit gatherings of employees and customers:
 - Stagger break time and limit the number of people in break rooms to abide by distancing standards;
 - Permit workers to take breaks and meals outside, in their office or personal workspace or in such other areas where proper social distancing is attainable.
- Encourage “working from home” for all employees who can perform needed functions remotely.
- Hold all meetings and conferences virtually, wherever possible.

Customers, Vendors, Suppliers

- Where feasible, mark high traffic areas and check out area floor space with six-foot markers to assist in maintaining social distancing. Provide informational signage in the store.
- Arrange the flow of customers to reduce crowding
- Limit person-to-person contact in the workplace.
- Limit contact with suppliers by:
 - requiring goods be delivered to private entrances if possible; and
 - requiring “drop-off” of goods instead of hand to hand delivery.
- Provide alternative points of sale outside of buildings, including curbside pick-up or delivery of products and/or services.
- Tailor promotional offers, contests, or other actions to adhere to social distancing guidelines for employees and customers.

5. Promote Safe Shopping Guidelines

Keeping our customers and frontline employees safe is the key to preventing the spread of infection. In addition to asking Washingtonians to “stay at home” as much as possible during this time of transition, retailers will communicate and urge shoppers to consider the following:

- *Simplify your trip.* Consider shopping on-line if option is available.
- *Let retailers shop for you.* Try pickup and delivery.
- *Plan.* Buy everything you need for you and your family, while leaving enough for others too.
- *Keep it small.* Go to the store alone or with as few people as possible.
- *Wear a face mask.* It helps to protect you and others in the store.
- *Wash and don't touch.* Wash your hands after shopping and don't touch your face.
- *Sanitizer.* Keep sanitizer on hand when hand washing is not an option.
- *Distance.* Keep social distance of a least 6 feet.
- *Be patient.* We're all in this together.

6. Implementation and Adaptive Management

Implementation entails development of individual business safety plans, education, communication, and an ongoing partnership with state and local health experts to adapt standards based on new information.

Individual business safety plan development

- WR will create a checklist to guide individual retail businesses as they create a specific COVID-19 safety plan tailored to meet their unique situations. WR will base this checklist on the standards noted earlier and be informed by recent public guidance from health experts, including, but not limited to:
 - “COVID-19: Protecting Grocery Store Workers”, Washington State Dept. of Labor and Industries Division of Occupational Health
 - “Guidelines for Grocery and Other Food Stores Providing Essential Services”, Washington State Department of Health, April 13, 2020
- WR will develop COVID safety training modules for use by retail businesses across the state.

Education and Communication

In addition to providing information on COVID testing and screening to employees and customers, retail business safety plans will take advantage of signage to educate and inform employees, customers, and the public. Signage resources are readily available at:

<https://coronavirus.wa.gov/business-workers/business-signage-toolkit> and,

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc&CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunication%2Ffactsheets.html

Partnership with State and Local Health Experts – Adaptive Management

To achieve the foremost priority of lowering and preventing further infections of COVID-19, retailers and state and local health experts must partner to adapt protective standards as more information and data becomes available. To avoid a patchwork pattern of standard across the state, we strongly encourage the state to take the lead in developing these standards.

To succeed, state and local health officials must work in a close, coordinated manner:

- The state should establish the standards for health and safety in the retail setting.
- Local health departments should take the lead role in the enforcement of those state health and safety standards.
- Facilitate communication and coordination across agencies and retailers on:
 - Status of COVID-19 infections
 - Emerging information
 - Resources for testing
 - Identification of regulatory standards.

Conclusion:

The actions taken in Washington State since early March appear to be “flattening the curve.” WR believes the data demonstrates we can begin to safely move to an approach that re-opens retailers guided by careful safety measures that protect against further spread of COVID-19.

This next phase should lead to the elimination of the current “essential versus non-essential” designations that have led to broad inequities and confusion throughout the retail sector.

To achieve the overarching goal of protecting the safety of Washington residents, retailers must partner with state and local health experts to ensure that their unique operational practices will adapt to reflect emerging data, information and guidance on COVID-19 infections.

COVID-19 has impacted every community across the state. Washington Retail believes that – by working together – we can begin to restart our economy while protecting public health. We look forward to revising this plan as needed to ensure that Washington’s main street retailers can once again serve their communities and bring their employees back to work.