Dealing with customers in the fight against COVID-19

Guide for businesses

Update 27.03.2021
According to experts, we will have to live with the COVID-19 virus for the foreseeable future. We, therefore, need to keep taking measures in order to prevent the further spread of the virus or new outbreaks as much as possible.

This ‘generic guide to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at work’ sets out the necessary minimum preventive measures to ensure that contacts between retailers and self-employed traders with their customers are as safe as possible by minimising the risk of infection and avoiding contamination as much as possible.

The preventive measures may be supplemented at sectoral and/or company level to take the specific context into account as much as possible, so that activities can be resumed in safe conditions. Other appropriate measures offering equivalent protection may also be taken. Sectoral protocols are approved by the competent ministers and apply to the entire profession. They are available in French and Dutch and are published on the websites of the concerned sectoral federations and on the website of the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue.

In addition to the prevention measures mentioned in this guide, it is also advisable to consult the “Generic guide to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at work” of the Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue.

The content of the guide was compiled with contributions from Comeos and the High Council for the Self-employed and SMEs. The guide can be supplemented according to the guidelines of the National Security Council and on the basis of new scientific understanding and best practices. The initial text was drafted after advice from the working group charged with preparing the exit strategy (GEES). The text was, then, adapted in function of the decisions of the National Security Council and of the Consultative Committee.
Scope

- Retail activities (excluding catering) authorised to open
- Other liberal and independent professions authorised to open without physical contact
- Shopping centres
- Street trade
- Self-employed professions in their own premises, at a customers’ home or on location
- Free professions with physical contact

This guide no longer applies to free professions with physical contact, fairgrounds, cinemas, wellness centres, indoor playgrounds, amusement parks, Class I and Class II gambling establishments, trade fairs and other exhibitions, as all these establishments must currently remain closed.

Sectoral protocols

- Each sectoral protocol contains an item which mentions the official sources of the prevention measures against COVID-19 and a reference to the generic guides (“Guide for Businesses” and “Guide to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 at Work” of the FPS Employment). There are references to the various websites of these sources. Each protocol is regularly adapted to the developments concerning the norms. Each protocol is dated on the day of its publication and the dates are updated accordingly.

- Each sectoral protocol is approved by the competent ministers and distributed among the entire professional group. First-line supervision is the responsibility of the COVID-19 coordinator, the operator or organiser of the activity, who can use a self-checking system (checklist). In addition, a second-line supervision can also be organised, for example by calling on an external certification body or an external prevention service from the sector or the professional organisations. Problems that come to light in the context of compliance are incorporated into the continuous improvement of the existing protocols.

- The list with the sectoral protocols can be found at https://www.info-coronavirus.be/fr/protocols/

IMPORTANT

In this guide, “face mask or any other fabric alternative’ means the following: a mask without a one-way valve, made of fabric or disposable materials, which fits closely to the face, covers the nose, mouth and chin and is intended to prevent contamination in case of contact between people. Scarves, bandanas, neckerchiefs and masks with a one-way valve and plastic mouth shields do not meet these requirements.
Guidelines for the customer

- Do not go to shops, if you show symptoms of disease.
- Please, respect the six golden rules under all circumstances:
  - Wash your hands regularly
  - Avoid contact with other people as much as possible
  - Think about people at risk
  - Keep your distance
  - Opt for outdoor activities
  - Respect the rules on gatherings

- Follow the instructions of the staff and the guidelines on display in the shop.
- It is recommended going to shops near where you live or work.
- **Shopping is carried out alone** or with a maximum of one other person from the same household or with whom close and lasting contact is maintained. An adult may accompany children under the age of 18 living under the same roof as him/her or persons in need of assistance.
- In **non-essential shops**, a customer may be accompanied by minor children from the same household or by another person from the same household or with whom the customer maintains close and lasting contact.
- In the case of non-essential items, shopping is only permitted **by appointment** and if you have confirmation of the time slot reserved. Organising a system of shopping carried out by means of click and collect is also permitted. In such cases, the customer must collect the goods ordered in advance outside the shop. Customers are not permitted to enter the shop itself. Home delivery is also permitted.

- **Limit your time** in shops, shopping centres and other essential retail businesses to a maximum of **30 minutes**. This may be longer in shops that work **by appointment**, whether it is an essential or a non-essential shop.
- **Keep 1.5 metres away** from other customers (that don’t belong to your family or your close contacts) and shop staff.
- **Wash your hands** when entering each shop and touch only the items you need.
- Customers must **wear a face mask** or a cloth alternative in shops, shopping centres and on trade fairs. If this is not possible for medical reasons, a face shield may be used. People who are unable to wear a face mask, a cloth mask or a face shield due to a disability, which is verified by a medical certificate, do not have to comply with this obligation. The obligation to wear a face mask or a cloth alternative also applies in shopping streets, on markets (including antique markets and jumble sales) and fairs and any private or public busy place, determined by the competent local authority and delimited by a notice specifying the times to which the obligation applies.

- **Pay** as much as possible **electronically** or contactless.
- It is advisable to give **priority** to persons older than 65, people who are less mobile and care personnel.
**Guidelines for retailers**

Regardless of the type of business, the guidelines mentioned in this guide must be applied. Traders who do not comply with them risk having their establishment closed down by the control authorities.

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<th>Only essential shops can stay open. These involve the shops whose main activity (more than 50% of turnover) falls under one of the following categories:</th>
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<tr>
<td>- food shops, including night shops</td>
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<td>- shops selling personal care and hygiene products</td>
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<td>- specialist shops selling baby goods</td>
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<td>- shops selling animal foodstuffs</td>
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<td>- pharmacies</td>
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<td>- newsagents and bookshops</td>
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<td>- filling stations and fuel suppliers</td>
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<td>- telecoms shops, not including shops that only sell accessories</td>
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<td>- shops selling medical aids</td>
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<td>- do-it-yourself stores</td>
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<td>- garden centres and plant nurseries</td>
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<td>- flower and plant shops</td>
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<td>- wholesalers selling to professionals, but only when selling to professionals</td>
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<td>- specialist retailers selling fabrics for clothing</td>
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<td>- specialist retailers selling knitting wool, crafts and supplies</td>
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<td>- shops selling stationery and paper goods</td>
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These businesses are permitted to offer all of the products for sale, including products that do not form part of their main product range.

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<th>All other shops will be closed and may only operate by delivery, click and collect outside the shop or by appointment.</th>
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<td>If operating by appointment, the following rules will apply:</td>
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<td>- Customers may only enter the shop during the time slot they have reserved and if they have confirmation of the time slot reserved.</td>
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<td>- Confirmation of the appointment can be provided by means of a durable medium on which the names and forenames of the customers, the date and the time slot reserved are recorded. This can take the form of a document delivered via the internet, an e-mail, a text message or a list of appointments maintained by the shop owner.</td>
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<td>- No more than 50 customers (including minor children) may be inside the shop at the same time in fixed time slots.</td>
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<td>- The only activities that may take place inside the shop are those connected with the immediate sales process.</td>
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<td>- While shopping, a customer may be accompanied by minors living under the same roof or by another person from the same household or with whom the customer maintains close and lasting contact.</td>
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In the case of businesses operating a click-and-collect system, the goods purchased must be ordered in advance. The goods ordered in advance must be collected outside the shop, without allowing the customers to enter the shop. Queues must be managed to avoid gatherings and in order to guarantee that the social distancing rules are respected.

Home deliveries of goods ordered in advance and the placing of such goods outside the home are permitted.
• All shops can open on their usual days and times. Night shops must close by 10pm at the latest.

• Queues outside the shop should be avoided. Every effort must be made to ensure that the distance of 1.5 metres is respected between people in the queues and to avoid gatherings. If arrangements are made by the local authorities, they must be respected.

• In the case of essential shops, the duration of the shopping must be limited to a maximum of 30 minutes. The duration of a visit may be longer in the case of shops that work exclusively by appointment, regardless of whether those shops are essential or non-essential.

• In very exceptional circumstances (e.g. when purchasing voluminous goods that will have a substantial impact on the household or dwelling), essential shops may allow two adults inside – either an additional member of the household or a person with whom the customer maintains close and lasting contact.

• Display instructions visibly outside and inside the shop, for example regarding the maximum number of customers who can enter the shop at the same time, the wearing of a face mask or regarding the use of toilets. A template for a display and a communication kit are available on the website of the FPS Economy (bit.ly/GuideCommerces).

• Duly contact your employees, including temporary workers and trainees, as well as external parties such as customers, clients, suppliers, subcontractors, freelancers, visitors, parents and others who come into contact with the company, to inform them about the rules in your company. Many people will have specific questions - make it clear whom they can contact via info boards, intranet, website, etc.

• Admit no more than 1 customer per 10 square meters of accessible floor surface. However, if the floor surface accessible to customers is less than 20 square metres, no more than 2 customers can enter the premises, as long as a distance of 1.5 metres can be ensured between customers.

• Customers must be able to easily maintain a distance of 1.5 metres both inside and outside the premises. Where possible, apply floor markings, ribbon barriers, physical barriers or a walking route to be followed.

• If the area accessible to the public is greater than 400 m2, adequate access control must be provided. Adequate access control involves organised monitoring of compliance with specific measures. These include control of the limited number of customers admitted, the compulsory wearing of a mask, the prohibition of assembly, the rule that shopping must be done individually and social distancing.

• Make sure your shop is well ventilated.

• In the case of non-automatic doors, leave the doors open as much as possible.

• Ensure the necessary hand hygiene for staff and customers by providing suitable hand gels or disinfectants Make the products available at the entry and exit and, where necessary, inside the shop (e.g. fitting rooms, ticket machines or payment terminal).

• Set up the till area so that a distance of 1.5 metres can be maintained between staff and customers, and between waiting customers in the queue. If this is not possible, provide other safety measures, such as partitions and screens.
• Ensure the shop is set up in such a way that the customer only touches the product he or she wants to buy. If this is not possible, limit as much as possible the number of times the product is handled by both seller and buyer.

• The sale of alcoholic beverages is prohibited in all establishments, including vending machines, from 8pm to 5am.

• Everybody from the age of 12 (including the staff of the store) must cover their mouth and nose with a face mask or cloth alternative. If this is not possible for medical reasons, a face shield may be used.

• Encourage electronic payments by bank card or contactless and avoid cash as much as possible.

• The payment terminal must be cleaned and disinfected after each use or provide hand gels or cotton buds for customers.

• If possible, work with orders and pick-up times.

• Take preventive measures in the fitting room: limit the number of people, maintain a distance of 1.5 metres when setting up the cubicles and organising the queue. Disinfect the cubicle after each fitting. Provide hand gel before and after use of the fitting room.

• Pay attention to the layout of your car park, e.g. by spreading out the number of parking spaces and spaces for bikes, so a safe distance can be guaranteed.

• Street sales and displays, flags or other attributes outside the shops are prohibited.

• It is advisable to give priority to persons older than 65, people who are less mobile and care personnel.

• Door-to-door sales are prohibited, however, street trading activities in articles of food are permitted.

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**Guidelines for shopping centres**

• Contact your staff, including temporary workers and trainees, in good time to inform them of the rules in force in the shopping centre and train them in their implementation. Do the same with outsiders, such as customers, suppliers, subcontractors, freelancers, visitors, relatives, etc. who may be in contact with your company. Many people are likely to ask concrete questions: it is essential to make it clear to them who they can talk to, via posters, information boards, your intranet or your website.

• Display instructions visibly outside the shopping centre, for example regarding the maximum number of customers who can enter the shop at the same time, the wearing of a face mask, or regarding the use of toilets. A template for a display and a communication kit are available on the website of the FPS Economy (bit.ly/GuideCommerces).

• Provide a separate entrance and exit for customers in the shopping centre.

• Provide hand washing facilities for staff and clients (suitable gel or disinfectant). Install these devices at entrances, exits and wherever necessary in the shopping centre.
• Make sure your shop is well ventilated.
• For non-automatic doors, leave the doors open as much as possible.
• Admit no more than 1 customer per 10 square meters of accessible floor surface, for a period no longer than necessary and usual.
• Shopping is carried out alone, or by a maximum of 2 people, depending on whether an adult has made an appointment in one of the shops in the shopping centre. An adult may accompany children under the age of 18 living under the same roof as him/her or persons in need of assistance.
• Organise a system to check how many customers are present in the shopping centre. Adequate access control involves organised monitoring of compliance with specific measures. These include control of the limited number of customers admitted, the compulsory wearing of a mask, the prohibition of assembly, the rule that shopping must be done individually and social distancing.
• Queues outside the shopping centre and at the entrances to the centre’s shops should be avoided.
• Customers must be able to easily maintain a distance of 1.5 metres both inside and outside the premises. Where possible, apply floor markings, ribbon barriers, physical barriers or a walking route to be followed.
• Everybody from the age of 12 (including the staff of the store) must cover their mouth and nose with a face mask or cloth alternative. If this is not possible for medical reasons, a face shield may be used.
• If possible, give the necessary instructions to customers of the shopping centre via the public address system.
• The guidelines for retailers also apply to the individual shops in a shopping centre.
• Pay attention to the layout of your car park, e.g. by spreading out the number of parking spaces and spaces for bikes, so a safe distance can be guaranteed.
• Street sales and sales in the aisles of shopping centres displays, flags or other attributes outside and inside the shopping centres are prohibited.
• It is advisable to give priority to persons older than 65, people who are less mobile and care personnel.
Guidelines in other sectors without physical contact

With the exception of services determined by law to be essential for the protection of vital interests of the Nation and to meet the needs of the population, companies and associations offering services to consumers will be closed, but they are able to continue providing their services by delivery, click and collect or via a system of appointments.

If operating by appointment, the following rules will apply:

- Customers may only enter the business premises during the time slot they have reserved and if they have confirmation of the time slot reserved.
- Confirmation of the appointment can be provided by means of a durable medium on which the names and forenames of the customers, the date and the time slot reserved are recorded. This can take the form of a document delivered via the internet, an e-mail, a text message or a list of appointments maintained by the shop owner.
- No more than 50 customers (including minor children) may be inside the shop at the same time in fixed time slots.
- The only activities that may take place inside the premises are those connected with the immediate sales process.
- During his/her visit, a customer may be accompanied by minors living under the same roof or by another person from the same household or with whom the customer maintains close and lasting contact.

In the case of businesses operating a click-and-collect system, the goods purchased must be ordered in advance. The goods ordered in advance must be collected outside the shop, without allowing the customers to enter the shop. Queues must be managed to avoid gatherings and in order to guarantee that the social distancing rules are respected.

Home deliveries of goods ordered in advance and the placing of such goods outside the home is permitted.
• Keep 1.5 metres distance. Apply floor markings where possible.

• Make sure your shop is well ventilated.

• For non-automatic doors, leave the doors open as much as possible.

• Duly contact your employees, including temporary workers and trainees, as well as external parties such as customers, clients, suppliers, subcontractors, freelancers, visitors, parents and others who come into contact with the company, to inform them about the rules in your company. Many people will have specific questions - make it clear whom they can contact via info boards, intranet, website, etc.

• Admit customers for no more than 30 minutes. That period can be longer if you are operating by appointment. Use alternatives for consultation and meetings, such as teleworking or digital meetings, as much as possible.

• Plan customer contact as spread out as possible. Avoid using waiting areas. If a waiting area is used anyway, organise the area with respect for the distance of 1.5 metres, and make sure that customers do not sit opposite each other. Position chairs with their backs to each other. Do not offer drinks to customers.

• Everybody from the age of 12 (including the staff of the store) must cover their mouth and nose with a face mask or cloth alternative in the spaces open to the public. If this is not possible for medical reasons, a face shield may be used.

• If possible, admit customers in a separate area and limit the number of employees present.

• Reorganise the reception area, so that the 1.5 metres distance between staff and customers can be maintained. If this is not possible, provide other safety measures, such as partitions and screens.

• Ensure the necessary hand hygiene for staff and customers by providing means to disinfect hands with suitable hand gels or disinfectants. Make these products available at the entry and exit and, where necessary, inside the establishment, e.g. when signing documents.

• In the case of customer contacts outside the premises: provide clear instructions for visits/work and ask timely for information about the location. Limit the number of employees/customers present in an area. If the presence of the resident is not required during the work, he or she must move to another area. Provide individual protective equipment.

• Door-to-door sales are prohibited, however, street trading activities in articles of food are permitted. The delivery and placement of previously ordered goods at home is permitted.

• The provision of services in the home and those where the distance of 1.5 m cannot be guaranteed are prohibited, except for the provision of services which are legally defined as being necessary for the protection of the vital needs of the Nation and the needs of the population.

• Street sales and displays, flags, door-to-door sales or other attributes outside the businesses are prohibited.
Guidelines for organising
street trading

These guidelines apply to street trade, including markets.

Street activity refers to any sale, offer for sale or display with a view to the sale to consumers of products and ancillary services relating to those products by a trader outside the establishments mentioned in their registration in the Crossroads Bank for Enterprises or by a person who does not have such an establishment.

A market is regarded as a manifestation organized or previously authorized by the municipality, to bring together persons who sell products or services at fixed places and times.

These guidelines do not affect the powers of the local authorities to regulate street and fair activities in accordance with the law of 25 June 1993 on the exercise and organisation of street and fair activities.

General guidelines for street trading

- **Door-to-door sales** are prohibited, however, street trading activities in articles of food are permitted. The delivery and placement of previously ordered goods at home is permitted.

- **Food trucks** can offer food and drinks to take away until 10pm at the latest. On-site consumption is not permitted. The sale of alcoholic beverages is prohibited between 8pm and 5am.

- Ensure that a **distance of 1.5 metres** can be maintained at all times between visitors to the street business and the traders.

- Draft a **coronavirus circulation** plan with clear demarcation of queueing line and walking route via ribbon barriers or crowd control barriers and mark the queueing line every 1.5 metres.

- Ensure the necessary **hand hygiene** by providing means to disinfect hands with suitable hand gels or disinfectants. Install them in such a way that they are accessible to the seller and the customer.

- Display the **preventive measures** that apply to street businesses in a clearly **visible** place.

- Encourage **electronic payments** by bank card or contactless and avoid cash as much as possible.

- The **payment terminal** must be cleaned and disinfected after each use or provide hand gels or cotton buds for customers.

- Ensure the shop is set up in such a way that the customer only touches the product he or she wants to buy. If this is not possible, **limit the number of times** the product is **handled** by both seller and buyer as much as possible.
Additional guidelines for markets

- Markets must be pre-approved by the city council, which must adapt all the guidelines below to the local situation.
- Fairs, antique markets, flea markets, annual fairs, Christmas markets and winter villages are prohibited.
- The competent local authority may require all visitors over the age of 12 to wear a face mask or cloth alternative.
- Display the prevention measures that apply to the market clearly visible at all entrances to the market area.
- Shopping is carried out alone for a period of maximum 30 minutes. An adult may accompany children under the age of 18 living under the same roof as him/her or persons requiring assistance.
- The rules of social distancing must be adhered to. Customers, market vendors, carnies and their staff must always keep 1.5 metres away from each other.
- A one-way circulation plan is being developed, with separate entrances and exits to the market. Only in exceptional circumstances, a motivated deviation from this is possible by the local government, which will provide an alternative solution.
- Clearly separate the aisles and queues, using ribbons and crush barriers. Use ground markings and/or signs to ensure the distance of 1.5 metres.
- Means for the necessary hand hygiene should be made available at the entrance of the market and at every stall.
- The maximum number of visitors admitted to the market is 1 visitor per 1.5 linear metres at a stall.
- A system is provided to check how many customers are present at the market.
- Provide a filter system at the entrances to the market to limit the number of visitors.
- Set up market stalls at a sufficient distance from each other and ensure a sufficiently wide walk-through path.
- Market vendors, carnies and their staff must cover their mouth and nose with a face mask or a cloth alternative. If this is not possible for medical reasons, a face shield may be used.
- It is strongly recommended that market visitors also wear a face mask or a cloth alternative on the market.
- The consumption of food and drink on the spot at the market is prohibited. No food or drink is offered in the form of tastings for the customers.
- Food trucks can offer food and drinks to take away until 10pm at the latest. On-site consumption is not permitted.
- The sale of alcoholic beverages is prohibited in all establishments, including vending machines, from 8pm to 5am.
- The general guidelines for street trading also apply to the individual market vendor in the market.
Monitoring compliance with the crisis measures

The police services are authorised to monitor the compliance with all crisis measures in the ministerial decree from 28 October 2020 concerning the urgent measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19. Various federal inspection services also carry out part of this monitoring. This mainly concerns

- the social inspection services,
- the inspection service of the Animal, Plant and Food Directorate-General of the FPS Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment.
- and the General Directorate for Economic Inspection of the SPF Economy.

In accordance with article 27, §4 of the ministerial decree of 28 October 2020, the Economic Inspection monitors the prohibition of door-to-door activities, as well as the measures concerning service providers, including non-medical contact professions. In this context, inspectors and auditors may carry out on-site inspections of service providers, verifying compliance with the prohibition on professional activities, or compliance with the applicable protocols, including compliance with the mandatory distance of 1.5 metres from customers.

If an infringement is established, the Economic Inspection has the possibility to send a warning to the offender, propose a transaction (administrative amicable settlement) or submit an official report to the public prosecutor's office for appropriate action. This is done in accordance with Book XV of the Code of Economic Law. Based on Article 26 of the ministerial decree of 28 October 2020, offenders risk imprisonment from eight days up to three months and/or a fine from €208 to €4,000 (amounts already increased by the surcharges). In addition, the competent local authority or the public prosecutor's office may close the establishment.
Communication material

The FPS Economy created a communication kit with posters, banners and pictograms for merchants, the self-employed, market vendors and municipalities.

You will find this communication material on bit.ly/covid19-commkit.