

Grocery shopping in the age of coronavirus



Grocery stores, including Wegmans, have shifted their hours in the wake of the coronavirus, closing early in order to have more time to restock shelves and clean. (file photo)

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If there's any comfort in a pandemic, it's that the grocery store will open even if restaurants and bars don't.

While the short-term supply chain remains stressed and shelves in many stores have been barren of essentials such as toilet paper, hand sanitizer and liquid hand soap after a run on the products by worried customers, they've otherwise been well stocked with food.

Jeff Metzger, the publisher for grocery industry publication Food World, said he's heard from retailers who say business in the past week or so has far exceeded any Thanksgiving, Christmas rush or snowstorm. Or, as one executive put it, it's the Groundhog Day of snowstorms that's seemingly never-ending. Only this time, there's little if any cheering for

the revenue boost. Metzger said grocery stores are embracing their public service role at an unprecedented time.

Nearly every chain has opted to close earlier and, in some cases, open later in order to both restock empty shelves and do a more thorough cleaning. At least two, Fresh Market and Dollar General, are designating an hour in the morning for seniors and customers who may be at risk because of an underlying medical condition so they may shop without a crowd.

If a visit to a crowded grocery store — which goes against the advice of health experts to keep one's distance from other people — isn't ideal, there are options such as pickup and delivery.

Here's the grocery landscape in the time of COVID-19 in Hampton Roads. Note, most delivery programs offer a free trial:

Kroger

Store hours: 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. (had been 6 a.m. to midnight)

[Delivery or pickup](#): Pickup fee of \$4.95. Delivery via Instacart fee of \$9.95-\$11.95.

In addition: At Kroger locations with fueling stations, the hours to pump gas are now 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Harris Teeter

Store hours: 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. (had been 6 a.m. to midnight)

[Delivery or pickup](#): ExpressLane pickup or delivery shopping fee is \$4.95. Same-day delivery via Instacart fee is \$9.95 (for \$50+ spent) or \$11.95 (for less than \$50 spent)

In addition: Customers can buy no more than three items of water, toilet tissue, canned meat, pasta, cleaning supplies, cold, flu and allergy medicine.

Fresh Market

Store hours: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. but the first hour, from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. Monday through Friday will be a dedicated shopping hour for seniors and at-risk individuals who might have an underlying medical condition.

Delivery: Instacart*

In addition: Stopped all sampling, including free coffee samples.

Food Lion

Hours: Varies by location. No changes.

Delivery: Instacart*

Aldi

Hours: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. (had been 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.)

Delivery: Instacart*

Wegmans

Hours: 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. (had been 6 a.m. to midnight)

Delivery and pickup: Instacart*

In addition: Limited options in its self-serve bar, restricted use of re-useable cups to the self-serve coffee bar only and the grocer is limiting the quantities of a [wide variety of things](#) that can be purchased.

Publix

Hours: closing two hours early, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Delivery: Instacart*

Trader Joe's

Hours: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. (had been 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.)

Delivery: none

Lidl

Hours: closing one hour early, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Delivery: Via Shipt, which requires a membership (\$99 annually or \$14.99 per month). Delivery is free for orders exceeding \$35, otherwise the flat fee is \$7. Tipping is encouraged.

Whole Foods

Hours: 8 a.m. to 8p.m. in Virginia Beach and Newport News. Hours had varied before. The first hour is dedicated to shoppers who are at least 60 years old because of vulnerability to the virus.

Delivery: Via Amazon Prime. Whole Foods is owned by Amazon.

Walmart

Hours: 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., which is a significant change at the store's 24-hour locations.

The opening and closing times at stores that had even shorter hours before remains unchanged.

[Delivery or pickup](#): Pickup orders are free (if a minimum of \$30 is spent). The delivery fee is at least \$4.95 depending on a person's zip code. It could cost as much as \$9.95. The store also offers a Delivery Unlimited membership that doesn't include a delivery fee per order for \$98 annually or \$12.95 monthly.

Target

Hours: All stores are now closing at 9 p.m. and the first hour on Wednesdays will be reserved for elderly shoppers and those with underlying health conditions.

[Delivery and pickup](#): Free pickup. Same-day delivery via Shipt for \$9.99 on a minimum order of \$35.

Military commissaries

Hours: Vary by location, but as a result of the coronavirus, all "early bird" shopping hours are suspended

In addition: Visitors will no longer be allowed to enter a commissary. The stores will be checking all IDs before customers enter. The only exceptions are children younger than 10 who are accompanied by an adult. Customers will also be expected to scan their own ID card at checkout so cashiers may avoid touching them.

Dollar Tree/Family Dollar

Hours: All stores to close at 8 p.m.

Delivery options: *Instacart

The service is the one most grocery stores in the region have partnered with.

Delivery fees generally range between \$3.99 and \$7.99 per order and in some cases, the company notes if the prices for a particular store are generally higher than shopping in-store or not. There's also a service fee of 5%.

Fees go up depending on if it's a busy shopping time, much like "surge" pricing for other apps. It doesn't require a membership but offers one for \$99 a year or \$9.99 a month that gives a person free delivery for all orders over \$35, reduced service fees and no "surge" pricing.

Orders can be made on the company's [website](#) or smartphone app. Tipping is recommended.

Coronavirus changes: grocery deliveries can now be left outside a person's door if they choose the "leave at my door delivery" option at checkout.

Amazon Fresh

Amazon had been delivering Whole Foods groceries to its Amazon Prime members but since late 2019, its entire Amazon Fresh catalog is also available. The cost is free for orders of \$35 or more. One-hour delivery costs \$4.99 extra. Requires an Amazon Prime membership which costs \$119 a year (or \$59 for students) or \$12.99 a month. Customers can select “unattended delivery” to have the order dropped off outside a door. Free trials available. Tipping is recommended.

The Neighborhood Harvest

The [Suffolk-based hydroponic farm](#) that works with a network of other local farms delivers fresh produce, full meals, beverages and bakery items. The first-time setup fee is \$30 and the delivery fee is \$2.99. If the order is at least \$50, delivery is free. Customers can pick and choose what they want delivered each week. Service requires having a cooler that holds at least 28 quarts.