



## Reusable Shopping Bags

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Consumers, governmental agencies, and the retail industry have increasingly been promoting the environmental and economic benefits of reusable shopping bags. While most people are transitioning to reusable bags, not much has been said about food safety concerns.

Certain foods, such as raw produce, meat, poultry, and fish may contain bacteria that can cause foodborne illness.

Reusable bags can pick up and accumulate the bacteria from these foods, which can then cross-contaminate other foods and non-food items.

Another concern is the Covid-19 and flu viruses, and the spread of these throughout the store.

Below are practical food safety tips to lower the risk for cross-contamination and how you can prevent the spread of the virus.

## At Home

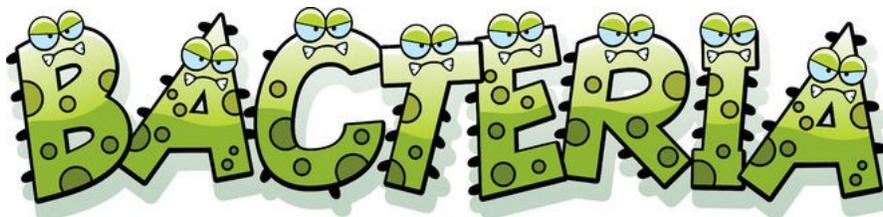
- Reusable grocery bags should be machine or hand washed frequently! Dry the bags in a clothes dryer or allow them to air dry. This can stop the spread of Covid-19. Viruses and bacteria can survive in the tote bag for several days.
- After putting groceries away, clean the areas where the bags were placed while un-bagging your groceries, especially the kitchen counter and the kitchen table where food items may later be prepared or served.
- If food residues from any food products have leaked into the bag, make sure to wash and dry the bag thoroughly before reuse.
- If reusable grocery bags have been used to transport non-food items, such as detergents, household cleaners, and other chemicals, wash and dry the bags before using them to transport food items. Another option would be to use bags of one color for food items and bags of a different color for non-food items.

# Risk of Spreading Virus

The risk of spreading viruses was clearly demonstrated in a 2018 study. The researchers, led by Ryan Sinclair of the Loma Linda University School of Public Health, sent shoppers into three California grocery stores carrying polypropylene plastic tote bags that had been sprayed with a harmless surrogate of a virus.

After the shoppers bought groceries and checked out, the researchers found sufficiently high traces of the surrogate to risk transmission

on the hands of the shoppers and checkout clerks, as well as on many surfaces touched by the shoppers, including packaged food, unpackaged produce, shopping carts, checkout counters, and the touch screens used to pay for groceries. The researchers said that the results warranted the adaptation of “in-store hand hygiene” and “surface disinfection” by merchants, and they also recommended educating shoppers to wash their bags.



## At the Store

- ★ Place reusable bags on the bottom shelf of the grocery cart (below the cart basket where food products are placed).
- ★ When selecting packages of meat, poultry, or fish, put the packages in clear plastic bags (often available in the meat and produce sections) to prevent leaking juices from contaminating other food items and the reusable grocery bags.
- ★ Fresh produce should be placed in clear plastic bags to help protect the items from contamination.



- ★ At checkout, do not place reusable grocery bags on the conveyor belt. Hand the bags to the checker/bagger or, if self-bagging, carry the bags to the bagging area at the end of the checkout counter.
- ★ Meat, poultry, and fish should be placed in separate reusable bags from fresh produce and ready-to-eat foods.
- ★ Non-food items should be placed in separate reusable bags from food products.

**Following these simple safety tips will ensure that you can help the environment without putting the family at risk for foodborne illness.**