

# Tips for serving disabled customers while maintaining social distancing

The Government has provided advice to shops on how to maintain social distancing within premises and when making collections or deliveries in order to protect the health of employees and the public from the coronavirus.

Certain shops providing essential goods or services are currently allowed to remain open to the public. For a full list of the shops that can remain open see the resource '[Essential and non-essential shops and public spaces](#)' in this toolkit.

The guidance below is to help you to serve and meet the needs of disabled customers to ensure that they are still able to obtain essential products, services and medicines, and so that you do not inadvertently discriminate against them while trying to follow Government guidance.

It is important to note that not all disabled people are more susceptible to the coronavirus and so many will still be able to shop in person rather than having to rely on online and delivery services.

## Shops and other retail outlets

The guidance for all shops and retail outlets such as pharmacies, petrol stations and post offices is given below with tips and advice from us on ensuring that adjustments that are reasonable in the circumstances are made for disabled customers. For more on serving your disabled customers, see our licenced guide 'Welcoming Disabled Customers'.

**To protect staff and customers, manage entry into the store, only allowing a limited number of people into your store at any given time.**

**Tip:** try not to be too rigid in enforcing this by only allowing one adult to enter at a time. Some disabled people cannot be left alone – e.g. someone with dementia or a learning disability. This means that the person who is able to go out to shop needs to take the other person with them and stay with them at all times. This is especially true now, as other family members are not allowed to visit. If you have staff regulating entry into the premises, ask customers if there is a reason why they have to enter together.

Be aware too that some disabled customers might find it difficult to stand in a queue for any length of time or in bad weather because of their disability. Allow customers to talk to staff about this. An adjustment might be to offer the disabled customer a time slot when they can return and enter the store without queuing or to phone ahead and collect items from the entrance. See the additional tips for local stores below.

### **Put up signage to ask customers with symptoms not to enter the store, and to remind both staff and customers always to keep two metres from other people, wherever possible.**

Use floor markings inside the commercial spaces to facilitate compliance with the social distancing advice of 2 metres, particularly in the most crowded areas, such as serving counters and tills

**Tip:** not everyone can read signs or see floor markings. This will include people with visual impairments, learning disabilities and people for whom English is not a first language. Staff may need to gently remind people to maintain their distance and discourage someone with symptoms from entering.

Someone with a sight or visual impairment may also not be able to see whether or not they are too close to another customer or member of staff. A customer with a learning disability might not understand the two metre rule. It also isn't always immediately apparent that someone has a sight impairment or a learning disability, so don't assume that someone is deliberately flouting the two metre rule if they come too close to another person. Gently ask them to step back or ask if you can help them with something.

You should also intervene if other customers are becoming angry with the customer who is not obeying the rule to prevent the situation escalating.

### **Encourage the use of contactless payments where possible**

**Tip:** some disabled and / or older customers might not have contactless cards or devices. In these cases, still accept cash or chip and pin but make sure that staff (and customers if possible) use hand sanitiser you provide after the transaction.

If you can, provide pop up handwashing facilities with soap, water and / or hand sanitiser

### **Remind customers only to touch and buy what they need.**

**Tip:** you might see a customer pick up items and then put them down again. While this should be discouraged, remember that some customers might be doing this because they cannot see the items. Many people with visual impairments use their sense of touch to decide what to buy. Since they are not all in the extremely vulnerable category, they will not be given priority slots for online deliveries and so need to come in-store to shop. If you see someone picking up items and putting them down again, ask if you can help them with their shopping.

**If feasible, you should also put up plexiglass barriers at all points of regular interaction to further reduce the risk of infection for all parties involved, cleaning the barriers regularly. You should still advise staff to keep two metres apart as much as possible.**

**Tip:** customers who are deaf or hard of hearing might be lip reading. Try to ensure the plexiglass barrier is as clear as possible to ensure this is still possible. Have your hearing loop signs clearly visible and remind customers that you have a loop. If the customer still cannot hear you or lip read, you may need to communicate with them by writing things down on a notepad and holding it up to the glass or with gestures and by pointing.

## **Providing a local and customised service – practical adjustments**

In these unprecedented times, consider implementing ad hoc adjustments and solutions for local customers. This might mean giving local managers the discretion to serve customers they know in the way that best suits both parties for the time being. Examples might include:

- Allowing disabled customers to telephone the store and provide a verbal list of items they need, which they can then collect from outside the store at a pre-arranged time. This might be particularly helpful for customers who are not able to shop alone, find queuing difficult or who have visual impairments or other reasons why maintaining social distancing is difficult.
- Allowing customers to book a time to shop when there will be a member of staff available to help them. This could be helpful for customers who have disabilities that affect their mobility or dexterity. Customers could wait outside or maintain a two-metre distance from the staff member helping them in-store.
- Allowing customers to telephone the store with a list of items they need and for local delivery in nearby areas arranged.



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