

# **Social Distancing: An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth a Pound of Cure**

When it comes to pandemic protection, I strongly encourage all of us to practice preventative measures in public places and at home through such things as social distancing, hand-washing, use of sanitizer, gloves and glasses or goggles, among other things. Consider it another line of defense so that our bodies can win the war without even fighting.

As an example, let me show you what a normal shopping outing looks like for me in the midst of a pandemic.

## **Dr. C. at the Store**

I keep in my car a roll of paper towels, surgical gloves, hand sanitizer, goggles and a face mask. On the way to the store, I listen to uplifting Christian music or talk radio. My heart is at ease and confident of the Lord's protection in all circumstances as I head out to do a little shopping.

When I park at the store and turn the car off, I take off my sunglasses and put on the nice-fitting protective goggles I bought at Home Depot. The most important thing is that they seal my eyes and are comfortable.

Next, I put my surgery mask on. I use about one mask per day and keep it lying upside down on the dashboard so UV light from the sun can kill germs. It's best not to touch the mask itself, so I'm careful how I take it off and put it on. I touch the ear loops, not the mask, and slip them over my ears.

Then I put my gloves on and put a little bottle of hand sanitizer in my pocket. I have plenty of hand sanitizer because I buy it in big containers which I use to fill up

smaller ones that are easier to carry. I have these small containers available for my staff and my family as well.

As I get out of my car wearing goggles, a mask and gloves, I take a couple of paper towels with me in case I have to open a door. I may use one to wipe down the shopping cart, too. Once inside the store, I keep my distance from everyone and don't dilly-dally. My goal is not to go up and down aisles seeing what's on sale or what's new. During a pandemic I want to get what I need and get out. I'm usually in the store for a total of around five to 10 minutes.

Although I keep my distance from people and move quickly to do my shopping, I never become tense, angry or anxious. Though I'm wearing a mask and people can't see me smiling, I still am polite, courteous and exude the peace of God.

When I am finished shopping, I stand in line a good distance from the person in front of me. When it's my turn, I put my items on the conveyor belt and use the plastic divider. I'm not afraid to touch these things because I have gloves on. After I pay for my groceries with a debit or credit card, I put the groceries in the back seat of my car, pull out my hand sanitizer, wipe down the credit card, and set it to the side to let it dry. The clerk who may have handled the credit card has handled thousands of others. They don't really have the option to sanitize their hands between every transaction.

Once in my car, I remove my gloves and throw them away. I then take the goggles off and put them in the passenger seat or middle console. I carefully remove my mask, handling only the ear loops, and put it on the dashboard upside down. I sometimes spray the inside of my mask with hydrogen peroxide and let it dry in the sunlight. I remind myself not to touch my face inadvertently. I then apply hand sanitizer to my hands, making sure I get between my fingers and under my fingernails. I keep my fingernails very short because the virus can hide under the nails.

If I have to fill up with gas on the way home, I take a sheet of paper towels and grab the gas handle with them. I believe that gas handles almost certainly carry the germs of the pandemic. At least I treat them as if they do. I recently heard of a healthy football player who believes he contracted COVID-19 from a gas handle; he spent five days in the hospital.

As soon as I get home, I take my shoes off and leave them at the door because the virus could be on the bottom of my shoes. I put the grocery bags not on the counter but in an area where we keep our personal items. The reason is that I want to make sure nothing on the boxes touches our counters.

During outbreaks, Mary and I are extra diligent about making our kitchen an infection-free zone. We wipe the counters down with Clorox spray a few times a day. We don't allow purses, cell phones, grocery bags, computers or anything like that in the kitchen because viruses can survive for days on these items, and it's easy to carry it from one place to another without realizing it. We don't always live with this degree of vigilance, but rules change during pandemics.

Before unbagging the groceries, I wash my hands thoroughly with foam soap. The Mayo Clinic recommends following these steps:

- Wet your hands with clean, running water, either warm or cold.

- Apply soap and lather well.

- Rub your hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds. Remember to scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.

- Rinse well.

- Dry your hands with a clean towel or air-dry them.

After washing and drying my hands, I put the groceries away—eggs in the fridge, frozen goods in the freezer and so on. I'm not worried about catching a virus from food containers because it has never been shown to be transmitted this way. It is potentially possible but very improbable. I also wipe off the doorknob on my back door, which is the one we use the most, and any other outdoor doorknobs if used. I do this with disinfectant wipes one or two times per day or as needed. I also wipe off my car door handle as needed.

I throw away the shopping bags, then go to the living room to relax! That is what my shopping routine looks like during a pandemic. The point is to take simple, practical steps to raise a physical barrier between you and the virus or contagion, but not to feel strange or anxious about what you are doing. Remember that peace of mind is huge in keeping our immune systems performing well.

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*Excerpted from Dr. Don Colbert's book, Pandemic Protection (Charisma House 2020).*