

Lockdown shopping: Retailers ramp up in-store safety measures

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

3 Apr 2020

Some of South Africa's largest retailers operating during the lockdown have introduced additional safety measures, including barrier screens at till points and protective visors, to guard against the spread of the novel coronavirus in stores between customers and employees.



Credit: Pick n Pay

Both Pick n Pay and Clicks announced this week that Perspex or plexiglass screens are being rolled out nationwide at till points, which is where the bulk of proximate interaction occurs with customers.

Pick n Pay says that these transparent screens – mounted at the till and situated between cashiers and customers – have already been added to 300 stores across the country.

In addition to Clicks till points, the barriers will also appear at the retailer's pharmacy counters. Clicks is also equipping its floor staff with perspex visors, essentially a plastic shield that covers the face and fits across the user's forehead.

The retail pharmacy chain says the visors have been designed to offer protection from droplets released by coughing, sneezing and speaking.



Credit: Clicks

“We are committed to providing pharmacy, healthcare and essential goods throughout the lockdown and are doing everything we can to ensure that our staff and customers are safe and protected,” says Sedick Arendse, Clicks chief store operations officer.

“These form part of preventative measures to protect our staff who are in constant contact with customers and will also provide our customers with additional peace of mind,” he adds.

Likewise, Massmart has also provided in-store employees with protective visors, according to a tweet posted on Tuesday. These will be rolled out to all the company’s retailers that are open during the lockdown, including Makro, Game, Cambridge Foods, Rhino Cash & Carry and Saverite stores.

“ The safety of our staff is of utmost importance to us. To ensure that our frontline staff are protected while serving our customers, we’re rolling out face visors to all our stores. [@Makro_SA](#) and Jumbo in Port Elizabeth are the first stores to receive them. pic.twitter.com/9CmXh8VUA— Massmart (@MassmartSA) [March 31, 2020](#) ”

Risk at the frontline

With frontline retail staff servicing a constant stream of shoppers every day, and often having to make use of public transport to travel to work, they bear the burden of increased exposure to the coronavirus.

For the most part, retailers that remain open during the lockdown selling essential goods have relied on physical distancing, frequent handwashing and use of surface disinfectants and hand sanitisers, and in some cases gloves and masks, as their core safety measures to protect in-store staff and customers.

Other measures to safeguard customers include physical distancing markers placed in queues near the tills, and drastically limiting the number of people allowed in store at given time. Customers are also being asked to queue and shop with a trolley, in order to encourage physical distancing.



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Clicks has halted beauty makeovers for the time being, and all makeup testers have been destroyed.

Dis-Chem and Clicks are both offering vaccinations to staff at no charge to boost their immunity against the flu virus. In addition, Dis-Chem says the company has placed orders for a sufficient quantity of thermometers to start monitoring temperatures of employees and will screen for Covid-19 symptoms.

Financial support for staff

Support for employees has also emerged in the form financial assistance.

Dis-Chem states that in addition to annual salary increases which came into effect at the beginning of March, each employee is receiving vouchers to the value of R1,500 to assist with purchases of food and essential health items to support themselves and their families. The retail group has allocated R25m to make these vouchers available.



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“Whether our employees are facing consumers in-store, if they are at administration or management level, or if they are part of our warehouse and distribution teams to ensure delivery continues seamlessly throughout the lockdown period, each plays a vital role in our operations,” says Lynette Saltzman, executive director at Dis-Chem Pharmacies.

“We extend a special thank you to all the staff that support us via all our various channels of services, which include the stores, Pack My Meds and our online application,” she adds.

The Shoprite Group also recently announced a once-off [R102m appreciation bonus](#) for its shopfloor and distribution centre employees as a ‘thank you’ for their dedication during this time.

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