



NRF GUIDANCE ON ESSENTIAL RETAIL SERVICES

State and local action on mass gatherings and closing of non-essential retail

In response to an increase in positive cases of COVID-19, some state and local governments are moving quickly to implement measures to limit the community spread. In some cases, governments are posting notices limiting mass gatherings in public areas without providing key details. This limited information contributes to significant confusion over which establishments, public spaces and businesses fall under these guidelines. Often the state government office or agency issuing instructions must provide further clarification over their meaning of “essential” and “non-essential” retail.

Retail is serving on the front lines of an effective response to this crisis – providing drive-up COVID-19 testing, e-commerce home delivery, curbside pick-up and providing other essential services. These are just a few of the examples how retailers serve American communities in this time of extraordinary need. NRF believes that retail business owners are in the best position to determine whether their individual stores should remain open or close. Retailers also intend to fully comply with government instructions. However, clarity and certainty is needed so that businesses may plan appropriately and consumers remain confident in their availability to access groceries, home and auto supplies, pet services, farm and agriculture equipment and livestock feed, and basic home health needs for children, adults and pets.

We strongly urge governments at every level to refrain from blanket recommendations or mandates to close retail businesses across all sectors as “non-essential.” Should the government deem it necessary to close retail businesses in a specific area of the country, we urge the local or state government to provide as much advance notice and detail to the impacted businesses as soon as possible.

Advance notice and specific details are necessary to avoid causing disruption from consumers overwhelming stores and exhausting available supplies quickly. It will also enable retailers to prepare their supply chains to handle customer needs both BEFORE and AFTER mandatory store closing orders from the government.

TALKING POINTS FOR STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

- Retailers are helping lead an effective response to this crisis – providing drive-up COVID-19 testing, e-commerce and curbside essential services to the public.
- In the absence of an immediate danger to the public, retailers that serve our communities must be allowed to remain open and operating.
- Individual operations should remain at the discretion of the business owner.
- Sudden or total closures of retail businesses can lead to increased panic by the public. This will lead to consumers overwhelming stores, eliminating on-site supplies and exhausting staff.
- Retail and restaurant supply chains work best when businesses can maintain normal operations and anticipate customer needs.
- If closures are warranted, the government must provide as much notice and detail as possible directly to retailers so that supply chains can be adjusted to meet sudden increase in demand both before and after closure.
- Clearly define “Essential” vs. “Non-essential” retail.