

For Immediate Release

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Media Contact: Erin Sigrist, President | 802-839-1928 | erin@vtrga.org

Vermont Retailers Step Up COVID-19 Prevention Measures
Focus on customer safety

Berlin, Vt. – As retailers across the state of Vermont reopen, the focus is squarely on customer safety and reacting to COVID-19. Businesses state wide are closely following CDC, VT Department of Health, and Agency of Commerce and Community Development guidelines for operations.

Retailers statewide are following guidelines including:

- Barring employees showing signs or symptoms of illness from working
- Employing strict social distancing (6 feet minimum) requirements
- Mandating face coverings for employees
- Providing easy access to soap and water and hand sanitizer
- Requiring frequent use of soap and water and hand sanitizer
- Conducting health surveys of employees, including temperature checks when possible, prior to the commencement of each shift
- Mandatory VOSHA training for all employees which covers
 - signs and symptoms of COVID-19
 - Sanitation methods and schedules

Asked how they had modified their operations to combat COVID-19, retailers gave a variety of answers. The common thread? The store is cleaner now than it has ever been, and customers should feel safe to enter and shop.

“We (Stowe Mercantile) have put in place new protocols for cleaning, sanitizing and personal protection for everyone. Our staff are wearing masks and do their daily health check when they arrive for work. On the sales floor, all of our registers, credit card machines, door handles, and shopping baskets are cleaned multiple times a day. Hand sanitizer is now available throughout our store for staff and guests. Practically speaking, our store is cleaner now than before the pandemic hit.” - Marc Sherman, Stowe Mercantile.
Stowe

Adaptation in terms of touchless payments, curbside pickup and employee PPE has been swift and successful for Homeport in Burlington.

“Homeport is now wiping down commonly touched surfaces 3 plus times a day with Clorox wipes, we have disposable gloves and masks(which are required by city ordinance) available for customers, hand sanitizer is available throughout the store and we are observing limited occupancy and social distancing. We have converted to completely touchless transactions for all sales 50 dollars or less and now accept "Apple Pay" and "Tap to Pay". Finally for customers who are at greater risk we have available a comprehensive web store and phone shopping and are offering curbside pickup or local delivery(free over 100 dollars). It is, **by far**, the safest it has ever been in our 37 years to shop in our store.” - Mark Bouchette, Homeport, Burlington

At University Mall, in South Burlington, COVID-19 has meant a whole host of new procedures to protect customers and staff as they shop

“University Mall has put new protocols in place for the safety and wellbeing of our visitors and employees. We have implemented extra cleaning protocols throughout the center to ensure a safe environment for our guests, with extra emphasis put on high-touch, high traffic areas. Mall hours have been condensed to 11am-7pm daily which allows for more time to thoroughly deep clean and sanitize while the mall is closed. Store employees, janitors and security officers are required to wear masks and we encourage customers to do so as well. Sanitation stations are located throughout the mall and soft seating areas and food court tables and chairs have been removed to encourage social distancing. We know change is not always easy, but it is our promise to keep the wellbeing and safety of our community, stores, visitors and our own team as our highest priority.” - Heather Tremblay, University Mall

Shoppers should feel confident that they can safely enter retail stores statewide. VRGA asks shoppers to please wear a mask when shopping for the safety of themselves and those around them. Take advantage of hand sanitizer available as you enter and exit shops. Working together, we can keep stores open and stop the spread of this virus.

VRGA is working closely with the office of Governor Scott and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to safely reopen retail in Vermont. A variety of resources for responding to COVID-19 and preparing for reopening can be found on the association’s Coronavirus Resource Page at <https://bit.ly/VRGAhealthinfo>, including a reopening checklist, summary of COVID-19 executive orders and addendums, and more.

VRGA provides access to an impressive array of benefits including payroll processing, credit-debit card processing savings, reduced-cost shipping programs, dental insurance plans, and Multi-State “Closed” MEP 401k Plan for retail employees. VRGA also provides full-time representation in the in the legislature with opportunities to address legislators directly about retail and food business related issues.

To learn more about the work VRGA does, visit their website at www.vtrga.org, follow them on [facebook](#) & [twitter](#), call their office at (802) 839-1928 or visit them at 963 Paine Turnpike N, Berlin, VT 05602.

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About Vermont Retail & Grocers Association:

The Vermont Retail & Grocers Association represents approximately 800 Vermont retail stores and 250 suppliers to the industry, including members of the Vermont Specialty Food Association. VRGA is an association of merchants and trade partners united to promote the sustainable growth of the industry through the educational, economic and public policy needs of its members. They are the leading voice in the legislature representing members when it comes to proposed changes in laws surrounding employment regulations, taxation, bottle redemption, sugar tax and much more.