

Opinion | I went to Costco in the age of coronavirus. Here's what it was like

Brian Bradley

I went shopping at Costco in the height of COVID-19 anxiety on Friday.

I wasn't trying to prove anything and I believe in the science of self-isolation. But I didn't shop much before the grocery shelves were left barren by the panic buying last week.

So, out of necessities — like bread and fruit — I decided to venture out to restock my cupboards at a local market — to offer support — and at Costco to check out the safety measures I heard were put in place.

The fate of small and large businesses, independent and corporately-owned, has been on my mind since Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency and many operations in Ontario were closed. I was once a retail and restaurant manager who closely counted results on a profit and loss statement each month. I agonized over numbers then. I couldn't imagine what it would be like now.

So I ventured out to my local farmer's market to get a few items. I kept safety in mind. I put on a mask and filled a bag with items I wanted. The vendor, anxious for a sale, inspected it without touching and took payment wearing gloves. At another vendor, I paid with debit card and used the tap function, avoiding contact. I was never closer than three feet to any person.

Feeling more confident that social distancing was possible, I headed to Costco with my membership card-carrying mom in tow.

It was apparent the shopping experience was going to be different as soon as we arrived at our local Ancaster, Ont. location. The front entrance was blocked off with shopping carts. Two employees and two police officers directed us to a line.

Customers were required to take a cart, increasing the social distance between us as we waited, and given wipes to clean our hands and the cart handles. We were allowed into the store in waves to keep order and prevent crowding around cashiers. No one could enter until someone had left.

"It will be sparse inside but we want a safe shopping experience," a worker directing foot traffic told me.

Once inside, another employee inspected my mom's membership card — from a distance without touching it — and gestured to a sign that outlined what was not in stock. It included Lysol wipes, toilet paper, gloves, soft soap and Tylenol.

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