

Some Local Grocery Stores Turning Away Those Who Can't Shop Alone

By **Jennifer Walker** - January 22, 2021



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KAWARTHA LAKES – Mary Scott says she was shocked when the Lindsay Loblaws tried to tell her that she could not shop with her child recently.

According to Scott, she was told she could not enter the Loblaws store as she stood waiting at the doors, masked, with her 11-year-old child.

She said the young man guarding the door seemed quite uncomfortable when he attempted to turn her away. She then told him that leaving her 11-year-old out in a cold car wasn't an option. According to Scott, he explained that the next time she needs to shop, she needs to be alone but he proceeded to bend the rules and allow entry.

"Its hard to believe that they can turn moms away with kids but then you hear stories about people getting charged for leaving their kids with grandparents to shop," she said.

She noted that next time she needs to shop with her children she will be choosing a different grocery store. She believes she was only given permission to enter, as the employee seemed quite uncomfortable with the situation.

Multiple people have expressed concern after similar incidents happened to them.

In a facebook post, single mother, Sandy Curry said she and her kids were also turned away from the Loblaws in Lindsay.

"The girl at the front told me I am not allowed to shop with my children as it's only one person

per family." she stated in a Facebook post. "This is so unfair considering I am a single mother just trying to purchase groceries for my household."

Curry went on to say they were all wearing masks and gloves and she has no choice but to take her children with her. She also said another woman and her kids were turned away while she was there.

Kawartha 411 reached out to the Lindsay Loblaws and spoke to the assistant manager, Kyle Short, who explained that this is not their policy but would not speak on the matter and directed us to reach out to the Loblaws Public Relations Department.

After reaching out to the department numerous times, Kawartha411 received a response via email.

"We have been in touch with the store who has conducted a thorough investigation into the matter as it is not our policy to turn families away," the Public Relations Department stated. "Our stores have social distancing measures in place, including limiting the number of people that can enter the store. While we do suggest customers reduce the number of people in their party to allow for social distancing, we understand that this isn't always possible and are happy to make exceptions where necessary, such as in the case of customers who require assistance or parents with children."

The department also apologized and noted that various levels of management, including store and district supervisors, have reviewed the situation and CCTV footage from the store.

Public Relations officials said they have also reiterated the policy to colleagues to ensure this doesn't happen again.

"We sincerely apologize if the customer was made to feel unwelcome in any way and would like to invite her back to the store where the team will do what they can to ensure she has a positive shopping experience," they said.

Recently, the province declared a second state of emergency with new measures and an enforceable stay at home order with an enforceable mask order.

But while the new restrictions are tighter and mandatory, the government has not explicitly stated that families are expected to shop alone.

On January 12, details were provided by Premier Doug Ford, Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, Solicitor General Sylvia Jones, Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health, and Dr. Adalsteinn (Steini) Brown, Co-Chair of the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table.

"The latest modelling data shows that Ontario is in a crisis and, with the current trends, our hospital ICUs will be overwhelmed in a few short weeks with unthinkable consequences," said Premier Ford. "That's why we are taking urgent and decisive action, which includes declaring a provincial emergency and imposing a stay-at-home-order. We need people to only go out only for essential trips to pick up groceries or go to medical appointments. By doing the right thing and staying home, you can stay safe and save lives."

For Kim Darke, her weekly grocery runs at Farm Boy in Peterborough came to an end last May. According to Darke, she suffers from mobility issues and requires her husband to shop with her

as she struggles to lift any items in the store.

"When we got to the front of the line we were told that only I could go in," she said. "We explained the situation but they refused and now we changed where we do our shopping."

Kawartha411 reached out to Farm Boy in Peterborough and spoke to a store manager who would not provide his name and was reluctant to speak on the issue.

"There is so much misinformation (from the government) with this thing, they want you to limit people in the store," he said. "We do everything we possibly can, we can't please everybody."

The store manager noted that they deal with the situation case by case as customers come to the door.

"If four adults come up we will probably ask them to have one come in but no we would not ask for kids to be left in the car, we deal with it as they come to the store."

And while curbside pick up is a great option for some, for Darke, that doesn't work for their large family.

"People have told me before, you can always get the curbside pick up, I tried that, half the time the orders aren't right, I want to pick out my own and not have someone else do it for me," she said. "We have a large family, five adults and three kids in our house, we usually spend 500 to 600 dollars a week on groceries so its not a small order, Farm Boy unfortunately lost a customer, I will not go back."

Darke also noted that they're very careful when they shop, abiding by the rules and following guidelines and while she struggles to simply pick up a jar of pickles, shopping without her husband isn't an option.

"Hopefully the stores back off a little bit and use courtesy with people who are trying to feed their families and not able to drop their kids off somewhere," she said. "With kids not in school, parents don't have those few hours a day and I feel for them."

According to the Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge, HKPR, Health Departments Manager of Health Protection, Bernie Mayer, Grocery stores must take all necessary measures to ensure that they do not exceed the capacity limits.

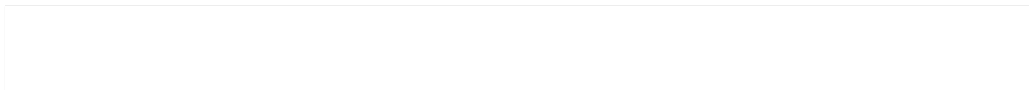
"Under COVID-19 Shutdown rules, stores that are permitted to be open have had to reduce their capacity to 25 or 50 per cent," he said. "Some stores have implemented their own additional policies so they can accommodate as many families as possible"

Mayer noted that stores must also ensure that customers, clients and staff are wearing masks, as well as physical distancing by six feet inside the store and outdoors if waiting in a line to enter the store. Grocery stores must also conduct enhanced cleaning and disinfecting. In order to accommodate customers, stores should include alternative means for shopping, including offering curbside pick up or delivery, he said.

"Call the store before going out to see what their policies might be. Should store policy be to limit the number of people from one household, family coming in at once, a shopper should ask for curbside pick up and or delivery options," said Mayer. "Alternately, people may want to choose to shop elsewhere where they can be accommodated."

Stores must make certain they comply with the regulations and look after the health and safety of customers, clients and their staff. The main goal right now is stop the spread of COVID-19, which threatens to overwhelm our health care system if we don't get the virus under control, added Mayer.

Some names in this story have been changed due to privacy concerns.



Jennifer Walker

Jennifer decided to study journalism after having a life long passion for writing. She began her career as a reporter for the Uxbridge Times Journal and moved on to freelance work for various publications after her and her husband welcomed their daughters. She has been published in various Durham Region newspapers, the Durham Parent Magazine as well as Equine Wellness. Jennifer continues to follow her dreams as a wife, mother and journalist and is so excited to join the team at Kawartha411.