

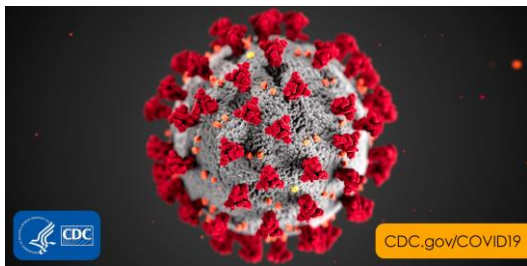
OFFICE OF CONSUMER PROTECTION

Retail Policies During COVID-19

July 24, 2020

Consumerism During COVID-19

During these uncertain time with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, most retailers had temporarily closed, and even those deemed essential and open, made changes to their store policies. Masks have been instituted as a requirement in order to frequent open retail locations. Many store-specific policy changes were made to adhere to the practice of social distancing to keep customers safe as well as employees safe. While this may mean a loss of shopping opportunities to consumers, and revenue to retailers, these policies are designed for the larger benefit to both customers and businesses.



As the [Governor](#) and [County Executive](#) monitor the situation, [new guidance](#) is [forthcoming](#) which directly impacts consumers through retail goods and service providers. What this means to you as a consumer is that the store shopping and return policies may be revised to offer less, or even better, customer service.

For example, some retailers are offering personal shopping services with curbside pick-up as well as returns. Many have extended their return policies from the original return or exchange date of the product. But, then, there are other retailers who have decided to suspend product returns and have implemented final sales policies until CDC guidelines are issued. For consumers, this means



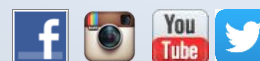
*Ensuring Integrity in our
Marketplace*



If you have been a victim of these scams, or if you have any questions about a merchant's activities, please contact the Office of Consumer Protection.

100 Maryland Avenue
Suite 3600
Rockville, MD 20850
Main: 240.777.3636
Tip Line: 240.777.3681
Fax: 240.777.3768

You can also file a complaint online by clicking [HERE](#)



that each shopping excursion requires pre-planning and research as each retailer will base its policies on the current phase in the economic re-opening at the State or County level. Below are examples of refund/return policies that are in effect with a few major retailers.



✚ Retailers Permitting Returns or Have Extended Return Policies

[Amazon, Walmart and similar online marketplace retailers](#) have continued with returns during the pandemic.

[Apple, Macy's, Kohl's and other brick-and mortar retailers](#) have extended their return deadlines. Apple, which typically has a 14-day return window but has expanded that window due to its store closures. The stores will accept return within 14 days after they reopen. Unfortunately, if your device is at an Apple Store for repairs, you will have to wait for the store to reopen to retrieve it.

[Best Buy](#) has similarly extended its return deadline for purchases made March 1, 2020 through May 17, 2020 to May 31, 2020. This **excludes** items purchased with a third-party contract (e.g., cell phones, cellular tablets and cellular wearables, AppleCare monthly plans, etc.) and major appliances. All other terms and conditions of the Best Buy Return & Exchange Promise apply.

✚ Pharmacies and Drug Stores

[CVS](#) - As of May 10, CVS's normal return policy was reinstated. It was temporarily changed on March 25 out of an abundance of caution, due to potential contamination risks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, [Walgreens](#) has similarly permitted returns within 30 days.

✚ Grocery and other Food Retailers

Grocery store shoppers should expect an "all sales are final" policy to be in effect until the coronavirus crisis subsides or CDC guidelines are amended. That said, [Costco](#)'s return policy has a 100% satisfaction guarantee that allows returns on most items, including groceries. And yes, Costco is still allowing members to return most grocery purchases for a refund or exchange.



However, Costco has made some adjustments to its normal return policies, and stores may not accept returns on high demand products during the coronavirus crisis, including toilet paper, bottled water, sanitizing wipes, paper towels, and rice.

Finally, [Sam's Club](#) has resumed its return policies.

✚ Retailers Which Suspended Returns

Target [suspended](#) its in-store product returns and exchanges between March 26, 2020 and April 26, 2020. Purchases with return dates during this period, however, was extended.

[H&M](#) temporarily closed its stores and hence suspended in-store returns. However, to compensate H&M [extended its in-store return policy](#) indefinitely or until further notice.

Basically, you won't have to worry about meeting the typical 30-day return policy until the stores reopen.

[Victoria's Secret](#), which also suspended its in-store returns while closed, will be [extending its return policy](#) for 30 additional days. This means that

returns can be made within 120 days of the original purchase date as long as you have the receipt.

✚ Retailers with No Changes to Return Policies

Several major retailers have announced [no changes](#) to their return policies. These include home improvement giants Home Depot and Lowe's, as well as Staples and Walmart.

✚ Pet Stores

Similarly, pet supply stores may have [differing shopping and return policies](#). They may have suspended grooming, training, and adoptions too. [Petsmart](#), while an essential business and open during the State of Emergency, nevertheless has suspended all returns. [Petco](#) has similarly suspended in-store returns. [PetValu](#) has suspended returns and extended return deadlines and instituted limits on the number of shoppers in the store at one time.



✚ E-Tailers

Many retailers are *only* available online. You may shop from a small business selling through Etsy or eBay, or large international based merchants which ship all over the world. These businesses have vastly differing policies—and sometimes vary based on what you buy. For example, [Zulily](#) will only issue a refund if the item was shipped within the U.S. and issue a credit otherwise. [Dress Barn](#) will allow returns but not on “masks and other limited items.”



✚ What Happens to the Returns?

According to [Consumer's Checkbook Magazine](#), retailers are quarantining returns in accordance with various company and/or CDC guidance. This means that when processing returns, especially via shipment, consumers should expect delays in receiving credits, refunds or exchanges.

✚ Phase 2 and Beyond

The County recently entered [Phase 2](#) which permitted limited in-store shopping experiences beyond the “essential” businesses. As we continue to face the uncertainty of these unprecedented times and the uncertainty of when customers will be able to freely shop in-store due to the coronavirus, it is important to check the refund policies of the retailer through their website, social media page or their customer service number to find out its up-to-date policy. Even when stores reopen, many of the conditions of the terms and conditions of the return/refund policies will still be in effect. Online purchases can often have a different policy than in-store purchases. As a rule, some items that are purchased online cannot be returned to the store under normal circumstances. Overall, retailers are willing to work with the customer with return purchases, whether they are online purchases or in-store purchases. However, the goal of the retailer is to provide a safe window of purchase for the customer!

