

Single-Use Products Law

COVID-19 and Reusables

Stores and food service establishments can both reduce waste and maintain health and safety standards recommended by the Vermont Department of Health (VDH).

Vermont State law ([Act 69 of 2019](#)) prohibits stores and food service establishments from providing the following single-use products:



Single-use plastic carryout bags at the point of sale. Single-use paper bags can be offered at the point of sale for a minimum charge of \$0.10 per bag, which stores keep.



Expanded polystyrene (i.e. “Styrofoam”) food and beverage containers, including cups, take-out and to-go containers, plates, trays, and egg cartons. NOTE: As of July 1, 2020, these products may not be sold in Vermont. Exceptions: expanded polystyrene can be used for packaging meat and fish or for food packaged out-of-state or sold out-of-state.



Plastic straws and stirrer sticks. Exceptions: plastic straws can be given upon customer request; hospitals, nursing homes, independent and assisted living, and residential care facilities can provide plastic straws.

Reusable bags are safe for customers to use.

According to the [Vermont Department of Health](#), reusable bags present no greater risk of COVID-19 transmission than any other surface that customers and retailers come into contact with. Moreover, the virus spreads mainly person-to-person through respiratory droplets and aerosols, not through contact with infected surfaces. This risk can be minimized by hand-washing and keeping hands off the face.



Encourage regular bag washing, which is always a good habit. Many reusable bags can go straight into the washer and dryer. Others can be rinsed or wiped with disinfectant.

Disposable items are not inherently more sanitary than reusable items.

For in-house operations, VDH and the [Agency of Commerce and Community Development](#) do not recommend that food service establishments replace their standard durable items with single-use products to reduce transmission of COVID-19. There is no evidence that single-use items are safer than reusables. Disposable service ware is convenient for take-out and food trucks. There are also COVID-19 risk-management decisions, like minimizing the number of staff in a kitchen, that can lead to choosing disposable service ware. Nevertheless, there are many opportunities for food service establishments to both reduce waste and maintain customer and staff safety.



Check with VDH regarding [health and safety sanitation practices](#) including:

- Limit the number of people who handle items.
- Limit the amount of time items are out in the open (e.g. do not pre-set tables).
- Avoid self-serve dispensers, utensils, plates, or napkins.
- Clean and sanitize all general use items between customers.

Waste Reduction Tips:

To reduce the need for disposable menus ([disposable menus are no longer required](#)):

- Post full menus online and encourage customers to view on their own devices.
- Write out menus on a chalkboard or other large display.
- Collect and sanitize multi-use menus between customers.

To reduce the need for disposable condiments:

- Provide single-serve condiments in small, reusable containers
- Ask customers before automatically providing condiments, to reduce food waste.

To reduce the need for disposable napkins and tablecloths:

- Replace cloth napkins and tablecloths after each customer and launder before reuse.
- Skip tablecloths and sanitize table surface between customers.

To reduce the need for single-use take-out containers, mugs, and utensils:

- Only provide utensils and paper napkins upon customer request.
- Encourage customers to bring and pack their own container for leftovers.
- Consider starting a container exchange program for takeout food or drinks ([UVM has one!](#) Contact VDH at 802-863-7200 if you want to explore this possibility).
- Develop contactless procedures for filling customer mugs (i.e. customer places mug on counter; employee fills it without touching; customer takes filled mug; employee sanitizes counter. Make sure to follow standard [VDH regulations](#)).

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Q: My employees aren't comfortable handling customers' reusable bags, what can I do?

A: One option is to ask customers to bag their own items. This also reduces person-to-person interactions.

2. Q: Some customers bring in visibly dirty bags; do I have to use them?

A: No. It is ok to refuse to handle a customer's bag if it is visibly dirty. In that situation, you can request that the customer bag their own items.

This document was reviewed by the VT Department of Health