

Covid-19: SA supermarkets appeal to shoppers to quit panic buying

By  Lauren Hartzenberg

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The number of official novel coronavirus cases in South Africa has climbed to 116, and grocery retailers have attempted to quell consumer fears surrounding stock shortages as photos and footage of panic buyers and empty supermarket shelves filter through social media.



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"The gaps which are now evident on our shelves and those of other supermarkets are because of the unprecedented demand as a result of fear over the effect of the coronavirus, but we have new stock arriving regularly and we are working around the clock to keep shelves stocked," said Pieter Engelbrecht, CEO of The Shoprite Group.

He added that the Group, which is Africa's largest retailer, has increased its orders and is sourcing new and additional suppliers, and that the company's warehouses have sufficient stock to replenish store shelves.

“ *My local Checkers today. Not one bog roll.*

Shame on the hoarders! pic.twitter.com/hm1uhZp3DH— Wendy Knowler (@wendyknowler) [March 17, 2020](#) ”

Unsurprisingly, Shoprite, Checkers, Pick n Pay and Woolworths are all experiencing unprecedented demand for items like dry groceries, canned food, UHT milk, and household cleaning and personal hygiene products, and report to be “working closely” with suppliers to meet demand.

“We have been preparing for the coronavirus for some weeks, working closely with our suppliers to make sure we have stocks in our stores and that customers can get what they want and need,” a Pick n Pay spokesperson told Bizcommunity.



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Curbing stockpiling

Some grocery retailers have started introducing measures to curb stockpiling by shoppers. Makro said it is now enforcing

customer purchasing limits, while Woolworths has set a limit of 5 units per product per customer on certain items.

“We are very mindful that stockpiling could hurt the most vulnerable consumers in our society who don’t have the discretionary income to make large purchases,” said Makro in a statement.

“ Is this Panic buying necessary or it's just paranoia? [#Coronavirussouthafrica #Checkers #makro](#)
[pic.twitter.com/4h8yv2sEAA](#)— Nontando Madlamini Mshibe (@Nontando12) [March 16, 2020](#) ”

Pick n Pay said that customers have been buying responsibly “for the most part”, but in cases where stocks are temporarily low due to heavy customer demand, the retailer will be limiting the number of certain products per customer.

“ Our neighbourhood Pick n' Pay does not indlude that foolishness. [pic.twitter.com/6EiJ7IQomQ](#)— Have a little
patience. (@Libonge3) [March 16, 2020](#) ”

As a fresh produce retailer primarily, Food Lover’s Market told Bizcommunity that it has not suffered any stock shortages as yet, but CEO Brian Coppin urged consumers to shop mindfully.

“Please consider carefully what you need and buy in a manner that does not leave others without much-needed items. Remember, if we all shop as we normally would, we will ensure that there is enough availability for everyone,” he said.



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17 Mar 2020



The Shoprite Group has limited orders via its recently-launched Checkers Sixty60 to a maximum of 30 items and individual products are limited to three per customer to facilitate quicker fulfillment of orders.

“We understand consumers' concerns but appeal to them to support each other to make sure everyone can get access to the items they need. Stockpiling will hit the most vulnerable the hardest,” said The Shoprite Group’s Engelbrecht.



The Shoprite Group's in-store communication

Ramping up hygiene protocols

SA's grocery retailers all report to have enforced stricter hygiene and handwashing procedures and are encouraging shoppers make use of hand sanitisers located in stores. Some also have in-store communication campaigns running aimed at educating consumers on how to limit the spread of the virus.

Food demos have been curtailed and fresh food usually on display, such as bakery goods, have mostly been placed into sort form of packaging.

Pick n Pay and The Shoprite Group have also committed to not increasing prices of key products that are in particular demand during the coronavirus pandemic.

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