

# Characterizing Grocery Store COVID-19 Controls in the Pacific Northwest



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## RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the controls that grocery stores are implementing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and do they vary across different stores and settings?

## CONTEXT

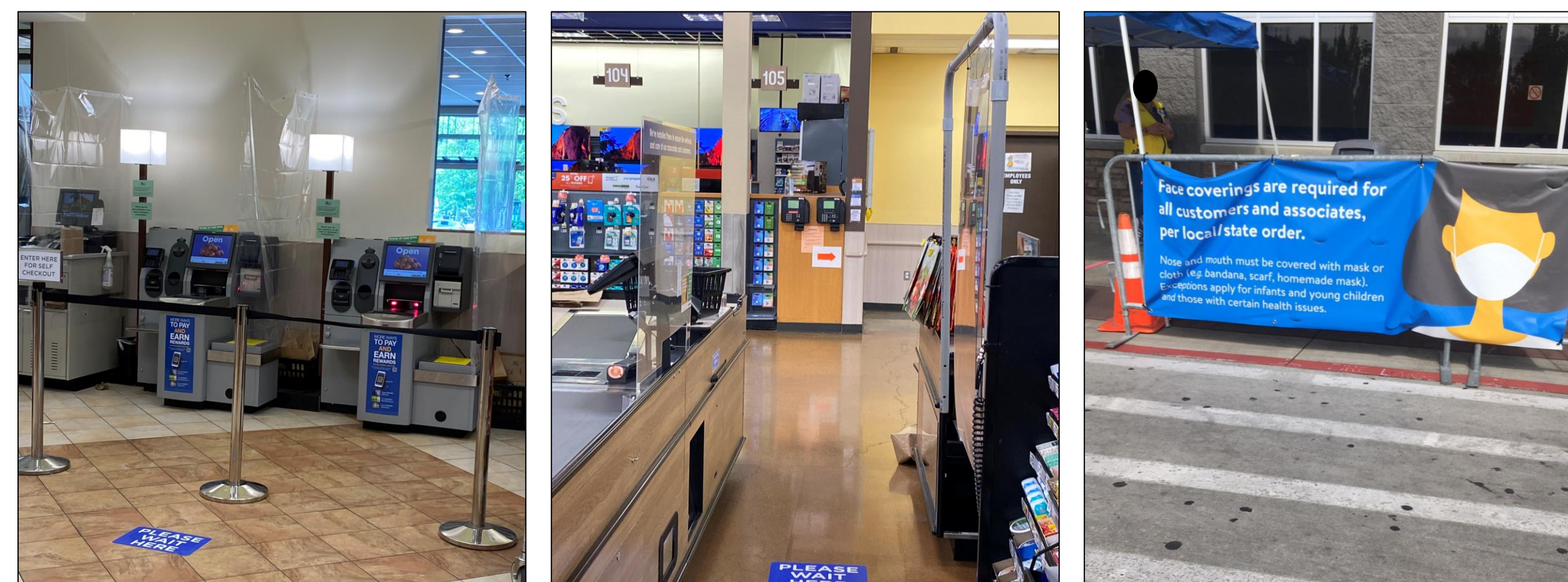
- Grocery store workers provided an essential service during the pandemic and were at increased risk of COVID-19 exposure
- Stores implemented controls to reduce the risk of exposure, but the types of controls and extent they were implemented remains unknown
- Characterizing the health and safety controls used is important for understanding determinants of risk, and areas to improve health and safety in grocery stores

## METHODOLOGY

- Observational approach to identify controls implemented in a purposive sample of grocery stores
- Sample selection:
  - Stores in Seattle, WA (n=9) and Portland, OR (n=7)
  - Median income of the area it serves (above or below \$90,000)
  - Association with a national chain
- Standardized checklist developed in REDCap to collect data on observable controls at the stores
- Stores were visited monthly by the same observer from May 2020 to January 2021

## RESULTS

Graphs showing the proportions of stores with mask requirements and enforcement between cities (top), chain (middle), and SES (bottom)



Examples of some controls observed during visits to stores: (left) screens set up between self-checkout stands, (middle) screens in the front and back of checkout stands, (right) banner on mask requirement with staff enforcement

## Summary of Results

- Common controls were mask requirements, plexiglass screens and social distancing markers at the front of checkout stands, and COVID related signage at the entrance
- Controls tended to stay in place (once in place) over time, though the presence of some controls (e.g., cleanings) declined
- Non-chain stores seemed to have less controls overall compared to chain stores (e.g., enforcement of mask requirement)
- Aside from some controls, (e.g., basket/cart cleaning), similar proportions of stores in each city had the controls of interest
- Also, there were similar proportions of stores in each SES group with the controls of interest aside from certain ones (e.g., enforcement of mask requirement)

## DISCUSSION

- Certain controls (e.g., plexiglass screens at checkout) were quickly adopted and common. Similar engineered controls may be useful for consistent adoption across stores
- Specific regulations could help ensure quick and consistent adoption of controls (e.g., mask mandate)
- A larger sample of stores and geographic region could provide clearer conclusions and more information on stores in rural communities
- Inclusion of other controls (e.g., ventilation) may highlight pandemic related vulnerabilities not captured by the study