

COVID-19 leads to panic buying contagion



At the start of the year, no one could have predicted how one virus that started in the Chinese city of Wuhan, a place most people would have never heard of until this year, would affect the lives of almost everyone in the world.

For most Australians, COVID-19 is experienced in the aisles of the grocery store, according to a new nationally representative survey of 1015 Australians conducted by McCrindle, in partnership with [CINT](#), into how the global pandemic is shaping the sentiment, behaviour and outlook of Australians. The survey was in-field from 19th to 23rd March 2020.

Over the last few weeks, there has been widespread coverage on Australians bulk buying goods. The proportion of Aussies who are actually buying much more than they need, however, is relatively small (6%).

“The stockpilers have gone in pretty hard, they’ve gone not just to their local store but from store to store, resulting in something that used to be such a normal activity becoming a high pain point for the majority of Australians – this contagion of panic buying has spread outside the metropolitan areas into regional parts as well.” – Principal, Mark McCrindle

Most Australians have bought the same amount as usual (42%) or have bought a bit more than they needed (30%). Although only a small proportion have bought a lot more than they needed over the last few weeks, this behaviour can impact others in the community, particularly those who are vulnerable. Resulting in almost 1 in 4 Aussies have been unable to buy as much as they usually would (23%) in the last few weeks.

Aussies support shops placing limits on purchases

Unsurprisingly, given the challenges which have resulted from panic buying, most Australians (94%) do not think people should be able to buy as much as they want. Which means the same proportion of people who are panic buying, 6%, believe people ‘should be able to buy as much as they want’.

“It means ordinary people cannot buy what they now need, including the most vulnerable – two in three Australians (66%) have been unable to buy goods they’ve needed. That single digit figure of Australians has caused a rippling effect, creating the shortages in the aisles and that it is quite remarkable – it’s this small proportion of shoppers who has had an asymmetric impact on the broader public. We had six per cent who went out and bulk bought in an intentional, strategic way and this prompted another 30 per cent to start stockpiling because they saw the supermarkets becoming bare, creating the problems we are still seeing.” – Principal, Mark McCrindle

Instead, Aussies support shops in placing limits on purchases (38%) and believe people should show self-restraint when it comes to bulk buying (32%). Older generations are more likely than younger generations to support shops in placing limits on purchases (49% Builders, 50% Baby Boomers, 40% Gen X, 29% Gen Y, 25% Gen Z).

Furthermore, though 1 in 4 Australians (24%) believe the government should intervene to stop bulk buying, a higher proportion believe this is the responsibility of the shops or the

shoppers themselves.

Aussies are willing to refrain from panic buying to protect the vulnerable in their community

Australians are willing to change their behaviour in a number of ways to ensure vulnerable people in their community are protected. Refraining from panic buying is the main action Aussies are willing to take to ensure everyone has access to necessities (75%). Australians are also willing to respect set shopping times for vulnerable people (68%) and self-isolate to ensure those who are vulnerable are not exposed to the virus (60%).

Innovating in response to the virus

Aussies have changed their behaviour in a number of innovative ways to protect their communities and continue supporting the economy in this time. These ideas include:

- Being resourceful with ingredients and eating from home
- Meal planning so they can shop less frequently
- Shopping online rather than in-store
- Supporting small businesses where possible
- Using technology to maintain social connection with friends, family and colleagues

"[My friends and I] are all exchanging recipes that our mothers used to make during frugal times and having fun doing it." - Survey Respondent

"Been using more online technology. This virus has dramatically changed the way we work."- Survey Respondent

"Because we're in self-isolation we can't go for our usual long walk so I've been trying to exercise as much as possible at home. I've also been emailing and instant messaging people a lot more. I'm trying out different recipes to use up ingredients that have been sitting in the cupboard for a while."- Survey Respondent

When will things be back to normal?

Most Australians believe it will be a while before things are back to normal. Two in three Aussies (66%) believe it will take between 4 months and 2 years before things are back to normal, compared to just one in four (25%) who think the situation will settle in 3 months or less. One in twenty Australians (5%) believe things will never

return to how they were.

As China passes through the worst of the virus and life is slowly returning to normal, Australians are being told to stay home unless it's to exercise, shop or for medical reasons. It may well be up to 6 months of disruption before life returns to normal - or the 'new normal'.

Recovering from COVID-19
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