OpenTable launches tool to help you avoid long lines at restaurants, grocery stores

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The dinner reservation platform OpenTable is launching a tool to help grocery stores and restaurants mitigate long lines and overcrowding in the age of coronavirus.

OpenTable announced Monday that it's expanding its reservation software to let users choose between available shopping times slots at supermarkets and retailers. So just as you'd make a restaurant reservation on the app, you can now reserve a time to shop or join a wait list.

The move comes as public health agencies and local governments urge the public to avoid crowded areas to slow the spread of the respiratory illness.

"As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, we see an opportunity to help our restaurant partners pivot to takeout, delivery and storefront business models, so we put a team of engineers together and built this in less than a week," said OpenTable's chief technology officer Joseph Essas in a statement.

Shopping windows and party sizes will vary depending on the establishment, OpenTable said. And users can receive text alerts when it's their turn to shop.

Calls for social isolation have increasingly pushed consumers away from in-house dining in favor of take-out. Last week, OpenTable reported a 400% surge in delivery and take out orders in the U.S.

Restaurants that offer take-out menus are limiting how many customers can stand inside at one time. Meanwhile, those who wait in lines outside risk contact with the virus, which is mostly spread through people who are infected coughing and sneezing.