

# Apple temporarily closes some of its stores, adding to concerns about disruptions this holiday season

Article

**The news:** Apple temporarily closed three of its stores this week because of a surge in COVID-19 cases among staff. Employees at the affected stores will be required to test negative before returning to work.

- An Apple store in Texas shuttered for five days when 22 employees tested positive after a busy Black Friday period.
- The closures come as COVID-19 infections continue to rise in the general population. This development brings new concerns about how the pandemic could affect the holiday season.
- The iPhone-maker delayed its office return date yet again, opting not to reopen in February as planned. A new return date was not announced.

The latest store closures—in Miami; Ottawa, Canada; and Annapolis, Maryland—are expected to last two to three days. Apple has also made changes to individual store policies, including emphasizing click and collect over in-store shopping. Additionally, it announced this week that face masks will be required for US store visitors.

Concerns about the Omicron variant, which is believed to be more transmissible, are undoubtedly factoring into Apple's decision-making. At the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, Apple was one of the first major retailers to close its physical locations.

**Balancing safety and sales:** “We remain committed to a comprehensive approach for our teams that combines regular testing with daily health checks, employee and customer masking, deep cleaning and paid sick leave,” an Apple spokesperson said. But this official policy may conflict with what happens at the store level: In the case of the Texas store, after four employees called out sick, their manager asked them to come in nonetheless.

Apple isn't the only major retailer trying to figure out how to stay open safely in the pandemic. Walmart has been **closing** stores for deep cleaning for as long as 48 hours apiece.

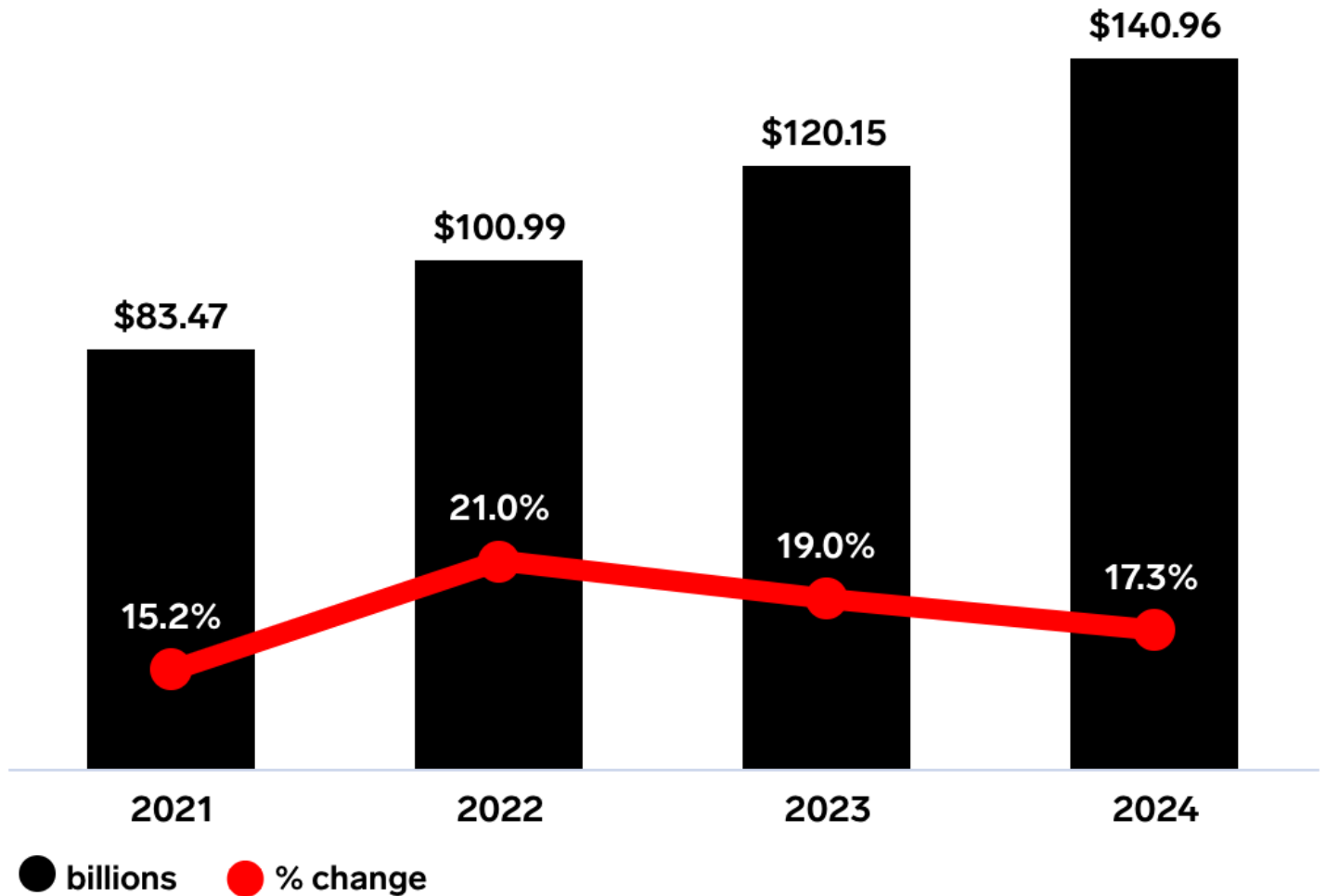
**Lingering shopping concerns:** This news comes as more consumers show a desire to return to stores—though they also support store precautions.

- 45% of US consumers indicated that occupancy limits would make them feel more comfortable shopping in-store for the holidays, **per** Sensormatic's North American Holiday Consumer Sentiment Survey.
- 42% said extending shopping hours to avoid overcrowding would make them more comfortable.

**Who might benefit?** We estimate that click-and-collect sales will rise 21.0% next year; tailwinds from lingering concerns about in-store visits could help propel that figure past the current projection of \$100.99 billion.

## Click-and-Collect Sales

US, 2021-2024



Source: eMarketer, January 2021

eMarketer | InsiderIntelligence.com