



Interim Guidance: Travelling by Public Transit

January 15, 2021

The following guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health for use by passengers on public transportation systems, and will be posted at <https://www.sfcdcp.org/>. This interim guidance may change as knowledge, community transmission, and availability of PPE and testing change.

AUDIENCE: General public who travels by public transit.

BACKGROUND: Travel on public transit is an important and essential activity. This guidance is intended to help transit riders understand the relative risks and how to address those risks. **Generally, activities in enclosed settings have much higher risks for COVID-19.** The longer the time spent inside, the greater the risk. The Guidance for Indoor Risk During the COVID-19 Pandemic (includes bibliography) can be found at sfcdcp.org/indoorrisk

Much of this guidance is based upon shared practices, and some of the items are specific to the City and County of San Francisco. Other public transit agencies, cities and counties may have different guidelines. Please check your local city and county for their guidelines. Because many people with COVID-19 have no symptoms of illness, you may not know whether you or the people you encounter are at risk of transmitting COVID-19. When using public transit, just like with any allowed or essential activity during COVID-19, it is important for everyone to follow recommended guidance to prevent COVID-19 transmission.

If you are interested in learning more about the safe use of other means of transportation such as paratransit, rideshare, carpooling, shared or personal bicycles or scooters go to sfcdcp.org/cdc-transportation

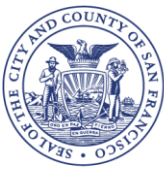
If you must travel outside of the Bay Area by plane, train or automobile, go to sfcdcp.org/cdc-travel

COVID-19 Basics

How Does COVID-19 Spread?

Our current understanding is that COVID-19 is mostly spread from person-to-person in the air through virus-containing droplets in the breath of someone with COVID-19. These droplets enter the air when a person breathes. Even more droplets can get in the air when infected people talk, sing, cough, or sneeze. People with COVID-19 may have no symptoms and can still be breathing out virus-containing droplets that can infect others. Transmission can occur through:

- Large droplets. These larger droplets are sometimes called “ballistic droplets” because they travel in straight lines and are pulled down by gravity. People nearby, usually within 6 feet, are infected when they breathe in these droplets or if the droplets land in their eyes, nose, or mouth from coughing and sneezing are propelled directly into the face, nose, eyes, and mouth of someone nearby, usually within six feet (droplet transmission),
- Smaller droplets or infectious particles. These can float in the air for a period of time and/or travel beyond 6 feet on indoor air currents, especially in enclosed spaces with poor ventilation. People sharing the same space are infected when they breathe in these smaller droplets and particles or the droplets or particles land on their eyes, nose, or mouth – even if they are further than 6 feet away. These droplets are sometimes referred to as “aerosols” or “bioaerosols.”



COVID-19 can also spread if a person touches their eyes, nose or mouth after touching a contaminated surface (also known as a fomite), however this is less common.

Prevention

- **Wash your hands often with soap and water.** If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol or 70 % isopropanol.
- **Avoid Close Contact.** To the greatest extent, maintain at least six feet of physical distancing between yourself and the people who don't live in your Household.
- **Wear a Face Covering.** Cover your mouth and nose with a Face Covering in public settings and when around people who don't live in your Household.
- Routinely **clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.**
- **Monitor Your Health Daily.** Be alert of symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, stay home.

Flu vaccines are critical in the fight against COVID-19 by (1) keeping Personnel and communities healthy and (2) reducing strain on our healthcare and testing systems that are responding to COVID-19. **Those over the age of 6-months are strongly encouraged to get a flu shot.** Find out how at www.sfdcp.org/flu

Essential Travel

Public transportation can only be used for essential travel as defined in the Stay-Safer-at-Home-Order. www.sfdph.org/healthorders . Whenever possible walk, bicycle or take a scooter to your destination to allow the possibility of greater physical distancing for those who have no other options for their essential trips.

Essential travel means travel for any of the following purposes.

- Travel related to the provision of or access to Essential Activities, Essential Governmental Functions, Essential Businesses, Minimum Basic Operations, Outdoor Activities, Outdoor Businesses, Additional Activities, and Additional Businesses;
- Travel to care for any elderly, minors, dependents, or persons with disabilities;
- Travel to or from educational institutions for purposes of receiving materials for distance learning, for receiving meals, and any other related services;
- Travel to return to a place of Residence from outside the County;
- Travel required by law enforcement or court order;
- Travel required for non-residents to return to their place of Residence outside the County. Individuals are strongly encouraged to verify that their transportation out of the County remains available and functional before commencing such travel;
- Travel to manage after-death arrangements and burial;
- Travel to arrange for shelter or avoid homelessness;
- Travel to avoid domestic violence or child abuse;



- Travel for parental custody arrangements; and
- Travel to a place to temporarily reside in a Residence or facility to avoid potentially exposing others to COVID-19, such as a hotel or other facility provided by a governmental authority for such purposes.

If you have any symptoms of COVID-19 or have been in close contact (closer than 6 feet for at least 15 minutes over a 24-hour period) with a person with COVID-19 or are awaiting test results, you should remain at home and [follow guidance for Isolation and Quarantine](#). If you must leave home to seek medical care and shared/public transportation is your only option, follow all of the safety practices detailed below. For emergency care, call 911.

For non-emergency medical care make an appointment ahead of time; there may be alternatives to in-person visits. Contact your health care provider to determine if telehealth may be an option. If you need a COVID-19 test [select a testing site close to your home](#).

Tips to keep physical distance on public transit vehicles:

- Move away from the doors of the vehicle to make it easier for others to board and depart.
- Skip a row of seats between yourself and other riders if possible.
- Pay attention to signs that indicate the correct distancing.
- Avoid sitting or standing face-to-face with other passengers outside of your household

Safe Travel Practices

It is important that you take the following steps to minimize your risk when leaving your home.

Plan your Route

- Before venturing out, consider planning out which modes of travel and routes you'll need to get to your destination.
- Check the [SFMTA website](#) for the latest information on changes to service and procedures, especially if you might need additional assistance.
- Consult the SFMTA webpage to see [data about passenger counts](#) to plan routes and times that are less crowded.
- Consider using a touchless fare payment such as Clipper card or the Muni mobile app. You can also pre-purchase your tickets online prior to traveling. The SFMTA website provides [information on fares and payment methods](#).

Face Coverings are required

All passengers taking public transportation must wear masks or facial coverings at all times, as required by Health Orders C19-07 and C19-12 and any other orders or directives amended or issued by the Health Officer www.sfdph.org/healthorders. Facial coverings both protect the wearer and other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has [more information about face coverings](#).

- Your mask or facial covering must cover both your mouth and nose.
- Unless you have a medical exemption, a facial shield does not substitute for a mask, but may be worn for additional protection.
- Children 2- to 9- years-old should try to wear a face covering to the greatest extent feasible. You



are still allowed to get essential services if your child in this age group cannot wear a face covering. Encourage them to cover their face to protect others in our community.

- Children over 10-years-old must wear a face covering. <https://sf.gov/information/masks-and-face-coverings-coronavirus-pandemic>
- Facial coverings should not be placed on:
 - Babies and children younger than 2 years old.
 - Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious.
 - Anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance.

Practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

- Before and after you ride public transit, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol or 70 % isopropanol.
- Once you reach your destination, wash your hands again with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol or 70 % isopropanol 60% as soon as possible upon arrival.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and wash your hands immediately with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Practice physical distancing

- Do not stand or sit within 6 feet of the vehicle's operator.
- To the greatest extent possible, stay at least 6 feet from people who are not from your household.
- Move toward the rear of the vehicle to allow older passengers and passengers with mobility issues to sit, physically distanced in their designated area when possible.
- Avoid gathering in groups and stay out of crowded spaces when possible, especially at transit stations and stops.

Boarding and Exiting

- If possible, board and exit buses through the rear doors. Wait for passengers to exit the bus, before attempting to board.
- Passengers in wheelchairs or with other accessibility needs should board through the front door where the operator can assist with the ramp or the kneeler.

Keep Windows Open

Open all windows to allow air to circulate whenever possible. This helps to disperse potential virus droplets.

- Riders should avoid closing the windows, even if it is cold outside—dress warmly so you can



remain comfortable with the windows open.

- Windows may be closed when it is rainy or when air quality is poor.

Silent Ride

Avoiding unnecessary conversations will reduce the possible transmission of infectious droplets. Singing, loud conversations and shouting also create a large volume of droplets and a greater risk of transmission of COVID-19.

- When speaking, keep conversations to a minimum and at a low volume.
- If you need to speak, keep your mask over your nose and mouth.

Protect people at risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

Individuals who are at [higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19](#), such as older adults, people with disabilities, and people of any age who have serious [underlying medical conditions](#), should limit their travel.

- If you are at higher risk and travel on public transit is necessary, consider wearing an N95 mask for a higher level of protection.
- SFMTA offers an [Essential Trip Card](#) that helps older adults and people with disabilities take and pay for essential trips. Learn more about the Essential Trip Card by calling 311 or going online at [SFMTA.com/ETC](#)
- [Shop-a-Round](#) is a service of SFMTA that provides registered seniors and people with disabilities a low-cost shuttle or subsidized taxi ride to and from the grocery store.

Take the same safety precautions with these travel alternatives that you would when taking public transit. Wear a facial covering, practice physical distancing to the extent possible, open windows and wash your hands before and after you travel.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What should I do if I see another passenger without a facial covering or wearing their facial covering incorrectly?

A. If you feel unsafe, you should move to another location in the vehicle further from the passenger where you would feel safer. If you notice a pattern of passengers regularly not complying with the facial covering order at a particular transit line or transit stop, please contact SFMTA. You can call 311 or visit [SFMTA.com/getting-around/muni/muni-feedback](#). It is not recommended that passengers request that another passenger wear a facial covering. In some instances they may have a documented medical condition that does not allow them to wear one. While we advise children ages 2 to 9 to wear facial coverings, they are not legally required to.

Q. Can I talk with the operator of the vehicle if I need help or if I observe a problem aboard the vehicle?

A. It is always best to keep your communication with vehicle operators to a minimum so that they can safely operate the vehicle. Nevertheless, you may always speak to vehicle operators when the need arises. Remember to stand at least 6 feet away, do not remove or lower your facial covering and do not raise your voice any louder than is necessary to be heard by the operator.



Q. There are many people sitting close together. Should I be alarmed?

A. It's possible that the people gathered close together belong to the same household. Just make certain that you are able to maintain sufficient physical distancing from the group.

Q. Are there other measures I can take to make trip safer?

A. One simple measure is to bring hand sanitizer with you. You can also use disinfecting wipes to clean surfaces that you must come into contact. Eye protection such as glasses, goggles or face shields offer another level of safety, but always remember that they are no substitute for a facial covering.

Resources

Stay informed. Information is changing rapidly. Useful resources can be found at:

- San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH)
 - <https://www.sfdcp.org/covid19>
- State of California COVID-19 Industry Guidance: [Public and Private Passenger Carriers, Transit, and Intercity Passenger Rail](#)
- San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency: [COVID Developments & Response](#)
- Centers for Disease Control:
 - [Protect Yourself When Using Transportation](#)
 - [Know Your Travel Risk](#)
 - [Domestic Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- Blue Ribbon Transit Task Force, Metropolitan Transit Commission: [Riding Together: Bay Area Transit Plan](#)
- American Public Transit Association: [COVID-19 Resource Hub](#)