



Interim Guidance: Travelling by Public Transit

March 18, 2021

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

Summary of Changes since the 01/15/2021 Version

Updated face mask requirements due to the [Federal Transit Order](#):

- Scarves, ski masks, balaclavas, and bandanas are NOT ACCEPTABLE face-coverings while on Public Transit.
- Only multi-layered cloth masks, procedure/surgical masks, and double-layered gaiters are considered appropriate face coverings on public transit

Added link about safer social interactions after being vaccinated.

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 [sfgdcp.org/indoorrisk](https://www.sfgdcp.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 [sfgdcp.org/cdc-transportation](https://www.sfgdcp.org/cdc-transportation)

If you must travel outside of the Bay Area by plane, train or automobile, go to [sfgdcp.org/cdc-travel](https://www.sfgdcp.org/cdc-travel)

If you have received the COVID-19 vaccine, please read more about safer social interactions at: www.sfgdcp.org/lifeaftervaccine

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

- Get the COVID-19 vaccine when it is available to you
- **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.

Safe Travel Practices

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

Stay home if you are sick

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 have received the COVID-19 vaccine, please read more about whether you need to quarantine at www.sfcdcp.org/quarantineaftervaccination.)

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.



Plan your Route

- Before venturing out, consider planning out which modes of travel and routes you'll need to get to your destination.
- 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.
- 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 face masks at all times, as required by both [federal](#) and [local](#) health orders. Masks with proper fit and filtration protect both 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](#) and information from SFPDH is available at www.sfcpcb.org/ppe

- Place your mask over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin. Make sure it fits snugly against the sides of your face without any gaps
- Appropriate and Recommended masks include:
 - Two-layer or double-folded **gaiter**
 - **Cloth masks** made out of 2-3 layers of tightly woven breathable fabric
 - **Medical procedure** (surgical or disposable) masks that fit well on your face
 - Real **KN95**
 - NIOSH-approved N95 respirator
- NOT appropriate and NOT allowed face-coverings include
 - Scarfs
 - Ski masks
 - Balaclavas
 - Bandanas
 - Unless you have a medical exemption, a facial shield does not substitute for a mask, but may be worn for additional protection.
- Children over 2-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.

These are not allowed on transit by [federal order](#), however they may be worn over an appropriate mask.



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.

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

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.

Q. Is there a system that can notify me of any potential exposures?

A. You can download and sign up for “CA Notify” which is another way for us to stop the spread. CA Notify (canotify.ca.gov) is an app you can add on your smartphone. It uses Bluetooth technology to recognize when you and your phone have been in close proximity to others infected with COVID-19 to help stop the spread of the virus in our community.

If you are using CA Notify and you test positive, your diagnosis will not be shared with others. However, if other people in close contact with you are also enrolled in the app, they will be told they had an exposure. They will be told the date of the exposure, but not the time, location or identity. If you are using CA Notify and you were exposed to someone who tested positive and they entered their result into the app, you will be told the date of the exposure, but not the time, location or identity. CA Notify is available through Apple and Google. See canotify.ca.gov for more information.

Q. What should I do if I am already enrolled in CA Notify?

A. CA Notify (canotify.ca.gov) is an app you can add on your smartphone. It uses Bluetooth technology to recognize when you and your phone have been in close proximity to others infected with COVID-19. If you were already enrolled in CA Notify before you get your positive COVID-19 test result, entering your test result helps stop the spread of the virus in our community. If you are using CA Notify and you test positive, we encourage you to enter the California DPH code texted to you into your app through settings. Your diagnosis will not be shared with others. However, if other people were in close contact with you are also enrolled in the app, they will be told they had an exposure. They will be told the date of the exposure, but not the time, location or identity.

ALERT: Remain Cautious

In alignment with the State’s recommendations, San Francisco is reopening at the State’s Red Tier starting March 3, 2021. The decision to reopen balances the public health risks of COVID-19 transmission with the public health risks of economic and mental health stress.

Even though COVID-19 case rates have come down, there remains a risk that people who you come into contact with may have COVID-19. Most COVID-19 infections are caused by people who have no symptoms of illness. We also have confirmed there are new, more contagious virus variants in the San Francisco Bay Area and that some of these variants are more likely to cause serious illness and death in unvaccinated people. The opening of sectors does not necessarily signify that these activities are “safe.”

We have made our best efforts to create guidance to help these activities and sectors provide safer environments for workers and the public. However, this requires that everyone do their part to make these activities as safe as possible, including wearing masks that covers your mouth and nose especially when talking, avoiding indoor settings to the extent possible, maintaining at least 6 feet distance from those you don’t live with, avoiding get-togethers and gatherings to the extent possible, if you must gather minimize the amount of time you spend with people you don’t live with, getting tested and isolating if you are ill, and complying with additional health protocols required of open businesses. People at risk for severe illness from COVID-19 — such as unvaccinated older adults and unvaccinated people with health risks — and those who live with or care for them are urged to defer participating at



this time in activities with other people outside their household where taking protective measures of wearing face masks and social distancing may be difficult, especially indoors or in crowded spaces.

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](#)