Interim Guidance: Travelling by Public Transit

January 27, 2022

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.sfcdcp.org/. This guidance may change as knowledge, community transmission, and availability of PPE and testing change.

AUDIENCE: General public who travels by public transit.

Summary of Changes since the 09/13/2021 Version

- Updated isolation and quarantine recommendations to align with the most recent health directives.
- Updated masking recommendations to wear well-fitted masks that are comfortable, with improved fit and filtration

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 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 activity during COVID-19, it is important for everyone to follow recommended guidance to prevent COVID-19 transmission.

Since early 2021, CDC has mandated the wearing of masks on public transportation including airplanes, trains, subways, buses, school buses, taxis, ride-shares, ferries, cruises, trolleys, and cable cars. 511.org has posted carpool and vanpool safety tips during the pandemic.

If you plan to travel outside of the Bay Area by plane, train or automobile, go to CDC’s guidance for domestic travel during COVID-19.

COVID-19 Basics

Read our Core Guidance to learn all about COVID-19. There is information about how the virus spreads, who is at greatest risk of infection and how to protect yourself.

Get vaccinated as soon as you can! Vaccination remains the most effective way to protect yourself and others. SFMTA provides free transportation to COVID-19 Vaccination appointments.

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 while they are contagious, please follow San Francisco’s guidance for isolation and quarantine, as well as relevant CDC guidance on what to do if you are sick.

If you must leave home to seek medical care and shared/public transportation is your only option, follow 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. Some types of masks and respirators provide more protection to the wearer than others. A well-fitted mask will help prevent both you and others from getting and spreading COVID-19. This is more important than ever with new, more easily transmitted variants of COVID-19 on the rise. CA DPH has recommendations on how to choose the best mask for you, CDC has recommendation on improve how your mask protects you, and more information from SFDPH is available at [www.sfcdcp.org/ppe](http://www.sfcdcp.org/ppe).

- Consider comfort, fit, and filtration properties of a mask that will offer the most protection and encourage you to wear it consistently.
- A well-fitted mask covers your nose, mouth, and chin and fits snugly against your face without any gaps. Gaps can let air with respiratory droplets leak in and out around the edges of the mask.
- A mask with good filtration blocks the virus particles form going through the mask itself. A good filtration depends on the right materials and by using more layers.
- When traveling on public transportation, wearing an effective mask is especially important because of higher risk of transmission since it’s often indoors, crowded where social distancing is not possible, and unclear vaccination status of other passengers.
• Recommended well-fitted masks include:
  o Double-masking using well-fitting surgical/procedural mask with a cloth mask worn over it. (NOT two surgical masks or two cloth masks)
  o Fitted surgical mask - using simple modification or face brace
  o Real KN95 or KN94 respirator
  o NIOSH-approved N95 respirator
• NOT appropriate or NOT allowed face-coverings include:
  o Scarfs, Ski masks, Balaclavas, Bandanas (All of these are NOT ALLOWED to act as the only face covering on transit by federal order.)
  o Turtleneck, collar, single layer of fabric, or any mask that has an unfiltered one-way exhaust valve
  o 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, see https://sf.gov/information/masks-and-face-coverings-coronavirus-pandemic.

• Facial coverings should not be placed on:
  o Babies and children younger than 2 years old.
  o Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious.
  o 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, and when you reach your final destination, 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.
• 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tips to keep physical distance on public transit vehicles:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Move away from the doors of the vehicle to make it easier for others to board and depart.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Skip a row of seats between yourself and other riders if possible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pay attention to signs that indicate the correct distancing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Avoid sitting or standing face-to-face with other passengers outside of your household</td>
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• Try to stand or sit at least 6 feet away from the vehicle’s operator, if possible.
• Maintain physical distancing from people who are not from your household, ideally 6 feet of distancing.
• 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 to help older adults and people with disabilities take and pay for essential trips. Learn more by calling 311 or visiting 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
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. Try 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 my 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.

Resources

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

- San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) & SF Government
  - [https://www.sfcdcp.org/covid19](https://www.sfcdcp.org/covid19)
- San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency: [COVID-19 Dashboard](https://muni.sfmta.com/
- Centers for Disease Control:
- Blue Ribbon Transit Task Force, Metropolitan Transit Commission: [All Aboard Bay Area Transit](https://allaboardbayareatransit.org/)
- American Public Transit Association: [COVID-19 Resource Hub](https://www.apta.com/covid-19/)

or visit [SFMTA.com/getting-around/muni/muni-feedback](https://www.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.