

PRINCIPLES FOR COVID-19 PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPERATIONS

29 May 2020

Context

Public transport operators have continued to service the Australian community during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic with risk mitigation and health and hygiene practices in place.

On 8 May 2020, the National Cabinet agreed to a three-step plan to gradually relax public health measures. As state and territory governments (jurisdictions) lift measures and people return to work and school, an increase in the use of public transport is anticipated. Governments have developed these principles in consultation with jurisdictions to provide some baseline guidance for passengers and public transport operators to ensure safe use of services.

These principles should be read in conjunction with existing health (and work, health and safety) arrangements and directions, as implemented and enforced by individual jurisdictions.

Purpose

These principles provide guidance about how public transport can continue to run as safely as possible for passengers and public transport workers. To do this public transport operators must identify and manage COVID-19 health risks. These principles have been prepared in relation to public transport including, but not limited to, trains, trams, light rail, buses and ferries.

School transport, express and touring long distance coach services, taxis, rideshare services or other transport modes (e.g. aviation) are not in scope of these principles. Arrangements for school transport services should be considered in the context of measures in place in schools, and principles for coach services will be considered separately as they are not run by jurisdictions.

Companies and individuals found not to be meeting their WHS duties may face significant penalties under WHS laws. Similarly, public transport operators found in breach of public health directions may also face on the spot fines or other compliance action.

Compliance activities are a matter for the relevant jurisdiction. State and territory governments remain responsible for the operation of public transport services and jurisdictions will continue to provide guidance for their workforces and passengers.

These principles should also be considered in light of other relevant advice that jurisdictions provide, specifically to their workforce, such as around hours of work or other measures to minimize mass gathering, including on public transport.

The principles will be reviewed as governments progress through the three-step plan to take into account any emerging challenges or innovative solutions, or as interactions with international travel start to be considered.

Specific advice for public transport passengers

Passengers may be subject to additional measures required by State and Territory governments.

Public transport passengers should take personal responsibility for their decision to take public transport and their behaviour when they use it. To limit the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) when using public transport, including on platforms, passengers should consider the following:

- Do not use public transport if you are feeling unwell, except in an emergency.
 - People most at risk, including older individuals or people in vulnerable health categories, may wish to consider their personal transport options on a case by case basis.

- The routine use of face masks in the community is currently not recommended, while the rate of community transmission is low unless a person feels unwell and travel by public transport is unavoidable (e.g. to access medical care in an emergency).
- Passengers experiencing any symptoms that may be caused by COVID-19, such as respiratory symptoms or a fever, must not travel on public transport and are encouraged to use personal transport to seek medical assistance wherever possible. In an emergency, please contact emergency services.
- Maintain good hand washing and cough/sneeze hygiene. Passengers may wish to carry their own hand sanitiser or cleaning wipes.
- Maintain physical distancing whenever possible and avoid contact with the driver and other passengers.
- Consider the most efficient route to minimise the duration of travel on public transport.
- Observe all operators' requirements related to COVID-19, such as contactless facilities (e.g. tap and go passes) and cashless payment, and any seating restrictions if relevant.

Passengers may also wish to consider:

- Downloading the COVIDSafe app to help facilitate contact tracing. Downloading the COVIDSafe app is completely voluntary.
- Where possible, seeking the agreement of employers to adjust work hours to enable travel during off-peak times and enable passengers to more easily observe physical distancing.

Specific advice for public transport operators

Operators may be subject to additional measures required by State and Territory governments.

Persons conducting a business or undertaking are required to take care of the health, safety and welfare of their workers and other persons at the workplace. This includes workers operating, or on board, a public transport vehicle as well as any passengers travelling on that vehicle.

To limit the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) on public transport services, public transport operators should undertake appropriate risk assessments and apply appropriate controls in accordance with jurisdictional public health requirements and in consideration of the following principles.

Governments acknowledges this is guidance, that some of these principles cannot be implemented by operators due to practical restrictions (e.g. card readers may only be available at the front door of vehicles) and physical distancing guidance may become challenging to adhere to at certain patronage levels on networks. Governments note that jurisdictions will implement processes and practices aligned with these principles as appropriate on a jurisdictional basis.

While transporting passengers

- Encourage passengers to maximise physical distancing to the extent possible.
- Consider where additional services or pre-booked seating may be possible to facilitate additional distancing.
- Consider whether it's possible to provide real-time service capacity/density via a pre-existing online or app-based notification.
- Reduce the time workers spend in close contact with passengers where possible, for example by:
 - Encouraging use of contactless facilities (e.g. tap and go passes) and cashless payment.
 - Providing passengers' access to the card reader furthest from the driver.
 - Restricting access to areas immediately around drivers, e.g. the first row of seats on buses.
 - Altering the way passengers enter and exit the vehicle, e.g.

- Request passengers board via the rear door where it does not infringe on safety concerns or the accessibility of the service for passengers with a disability or reduced mobility; and/or
 - If appropriate, request passengers to enter and exit through separate doors to allow for unidirectional flow throughout the carriage.
- Where possible, consider opening windows or adjusting air-conditioning to increase ventilation.

Passenger terminals and platforms

- Ensure cleaning and sanitising of high touch areas and bathrooms, in accordance with advice provided by the relevant jurisdiction, the Department of Health and Safe Work Australia.
- Provide appropriate signage to point to available hygiene facilities (e.g. bathrooms, hand sanitiser dispensers).
- Consider passenger movement flow around the terminal or platform that supports the above, whilst retaining continued access for people with a disability or reduced mobility.

Cleaning and hygiene

- Display signage and posters at terminals and stations, and inside vehicles, to encourage passengers to practice good hygiene before, during and after using public transport.
- Ensure cleaning and sanitising of all surfaces, doors, bathrooms and high traffic or high touch areas, in accordance with advice provided by relevant jurisdictions, the Department of Health and Safe Work Australia.
- Provide additional hand sanitising stations for workers, and passengers where possible, to encourage use.
- Ensure soap or hand wash is readily available in bathrooms (and showers, if relevant).

Worker interactions and work tasks

- Put in place procedures to closely monitor the health of all employees and provide training and regular communication on symptoms and actions if unwell, with at least daily reporting or check-ins by supervisors.
- Ensure workers do not attend work if feeling unwell, and seek medical assistance if experiencing respiratory symptoms or a fever.
- Ensure all workers are advised of workplace hygiene standards and are maintaining good hand washing and cough/sneeze hygiene.
- Ensure all workers maintain physical distancing and avoid sharing equipment wherever possible.
- Regularly monitor and review the implementation of hygiene measures to ensure they are being followed and remain effective.
- Further guidance for public transport operators, particularly as it relates to the safety of workers, can be found at the Safe Work Australia website.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) and shield screens

- It is not recommended that PPE (such as gloves, eye protection and face masks) is routinely used outside of healthcare settings to protect against COVID-19.
- However, some members of the public may choose to wear a mask in situations where it is not feasible to maintain physical distancing e.g. on public transport and/or if they are at increased risk of severe illness if infected (e.g. because of their age or a chronic medical condition). This may provide some additional protection in these circumstances. Additional guidance on the use of masks by the public in the Community is available at: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/use-of-masks-by-the-public-in-the-community>

- Unless specific risks have been identified, it is not necessary to install a Perspex or 'sneeze' screen between workers and the public due to shorter interaction times. If a Perspex screen is installed, operators should refer to Safe Work Australia's advice on managing additional WHS such as cleaning and installation.
- Operators should also be aware that using gloves, masks, or hand sanitiser might require managing additional WHS risks. Refer to Safe Work Australia for further information.

Additional Information

Department of Health

- Guidance on avoiding infection, including guidance on hand hygiene, cough etiquette and physical distancing: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/what-you-need-to-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19#protect-yourself-and-others>
- Guidance on hygiene: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others-from-coronavirus-covid-19/good-hygiene-for-coronavirus-covid-19>
- Guidance on physical distancing: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/how-to-protect-yourself-and-others-from-coronavirus-covid-19/social-distancing-for-coronavirus-covid-19>

Safe Work Australia

- Guidance on cleaning: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/cleaning-prevent-spread-covid-19>
- Guidance on public transport: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/public-transport?tab=tab-toc-employer>