

PRINCIPLES FOR COVID-19 PRIVATE BUS INDUSTRY OPERATIONS

9 July 2020

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, it is expected there will be increased demand for private transport operators to provide local, regional and interstate transportation. The Australian Government has developed these Principles, in consultation with jurisdictions, as guidance for the private coach, long distance, tour, charter and express bus operators to develop practices to ensure the safe use of services.

These Principles provide industry specific guidance on the National COVID-19 safe workplace principles agreed to by National Cabinet and should be read in conjunction with existing health and WHS arrangements and directions, as implemented and enforced by each jurisdiction. Each business should also put COVIDSafe plans in place as required, which may include additional measures to suit each operation such as seating arrangements and passenger numbers on specific vehicles. COVIDSafe workplans will require regular revision to ensure they remain relevant.

Private coach or bus operators engaged in transporting passengers to locations such as tourism attractions or hotels should seek to coordinate planning efforts to provide whole of journey safety to passengers.

Purpose

These Principles provide guidance about how operators can run services as safely as possible for passengers and workers. To do this, service providers must identify and manage COVID-19 health risks. These Principles apply to road vehicles providing coach, long distance, tour, charter and express bus services. Public transport, school transport, taxi and ride-share industries and other transport modes (e.g. aviation) are not in scope for these Principles. Separate Principles for COVID-19 Public Transport Operations are in place for public transport operators; refer to: www.infrastructure.gov.au/department/covid-19/index.aspx.

State and territory governments may choose to introduce further measures for industries based in their jurisdictions. These Principles supplement existing Work Health and Safety (WHS) obligations and advice from state and territory agencies, the Department of Health and Safe Work Australia. Companies and individuals found not to be meeting their WHS duties may face significant penalties under WHS laws. WHS compliance will continue to be the responsibility of WHS inspectors.

The Principles should be reviewed as state and territory governments progress through the three-step plan to take into account any emerging challenges or innovative solutions, or as interactions with international travel starts to be considered. These Principles do not override government advice should Australia's COVID-19 pandemic circumstances change in the future.

Principles

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 transportation service as well as any passengers travelling on that vehicle. To enable a safe return to operation it is recommended that operators introduce a COVIDSafe plan incorporating these Principles to guide their operations under the *Roadmap to a COVIDSafe Australia*.

COVIDSafe plans and business operations should reflect these Principles and implement business practices to appropriately manage the risk in each workplace.

There is a shared responsibility between customers and staff for the safety of all during this period. Customers should be aware of their responsibilities to maintain social distancing and hygiene during the service, including not travelling when unwell and discontinuing travel should relevant symptoms arise.

Physical Distancing

- Physical distancing requirements agreed to by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee must be adhered to where possible, for example in waiting areas, sales and office spaces.
- Operators are responsible for reviewing existing operations to manage COVID-19 transmission risks and determine passenger capacity of vehicles in order to practically manage physical distancing.
- Operators should introduce measures to assist all workers maintain physical distancing, where possible, for example by:
 - o avoiding sharing equipment,
 - o reducing the time workers spend in close contact with passengers and each other,
 - o restricting access to areas immediately around drivers, e.g. the first row of seats,
 - o amending responsibilities for on-board attendants to limit physical contact with passengers,
 - o consider employing additional staff to assist customers manage physical distancing.
- Encourage passengers to optimise physical distancing to the extent possible for example by:
 - o limiting passenger numbers,
 - o amending booking systems to restrict seat availability,
 - o introducing adequate signage to inform passengers of physical distancing measures,
 - o managing passenger's entering and exiting of vehicles to limit unnecessary contact.
- Where possible, consider opening windows or adjusting air-conditioning to increase ventilation.

Cleaning

- Ensure cleaning and sanitising of all surfaces, doors, bathrooms and high traffic or touch areas, in accordance with advice provided by the relevant jurisdiction, the Department of Health and Safe Work Australia.
- Industry specific requirements include:
 - o passenger seating on vehicles should be cleaned between each service,
 - o on-board bathrooms are to be sanitised between each service.

Health and Hygiene

- 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 and checking in 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.
- Provide additional hand sanitising stations for workers, and passengers where possible, to encourage use.
- Provide appropriate signage to point to available hygiene facilities (e.g. bathrooms, hand sanitiser dispensers).
- Ensure soap or hand wash is readily available in bathrooms (and showers, if relevant).
- Regularly monitor and review the implementation of hygiene measures to ensure they are being followed and remain effective.

Personal Protective Equipment

- 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 is unavoidable (e.g. to access medical care in an emergency).
- Face masks should be used in accordance with advice provided by the relevant jurisdiction, the Department of Health and Safe Work Australia.
- The handling of passenger luggage should be done with appropriate PPE, such as the luggage handler wearing of gloves.
- 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, appropriate PPE should be worn when physical distancing is not possible, such as assisting passengers with mobility difficulties.
- Some members of the public may choose to wear a mask in situations where it is not feasible to maintain physical distancing 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: 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 to separate drivers or workers from passengers. If a Perspex screen is installed, operators should refer to Safe Work Australia's advice on managing additional WHS such as cleaning and installation.

Passenger Services

- Consider flexible refund arrangements to encourage passengers feeling unwell to rearrange travel.
- Consider restricting access to passenger waiting areas to limit the number of people using the area.
- Consider passenger movement flow around waiting areas and vehicles to promote physical distancing and hygiene practices, whilst continuing to provide access for people with a disability or reduced mobility.
- Display signage and posters at terminals/stations and on-board vehicles, to encourage passengers to practice good hygiene before, during and after using the transportation service.
- Consider offering contactless facilities (e.g. digital ticketing) and cashless payment.

Interstate Travel

- Operators are required to meet any additional state and/or territory requirements for all jurisdictions the service enters.
- Operators are required to meet each jurisdiction's border control measures when providing an interstate service. Operators should regularly review border control measures as changes may occur.

Confirmed Case of COVID-19

- A confirmed case of COVID-19 in a staff member or passenger does not automatically require the closure of an entire workplace or transport service.
- Put in place procedures should a passenger display signs of COVID-19 to ensure safe transportation of all passengers, in accordance with advice provided by the relevant jurisdiction, the Department of Health and Safe Work Australia.
- Put in place procedures should a person with a confirmed case of COVID-19 have travelled on a service, including by:
 - o implementing advice and protocols from relevant state and territory agencies, the Department of Health and Safe Work Australia,
 - o following the health advice provided by the relevant jurisdiction regarding actions to take for all staff who came into contact with the passenger,
 - o carrying out additional deep clean and disinfection of areas the person could have come into contact with.

Additional Information

Department of Health

- Guidance on avoiding infection, including guidance on hand hygiene, cough etiquette and physical distancing: 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: 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: 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
- Guidance on the use of face masks: www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-use-of-masks-by-the-public-in-the-community

Safe Work Australia

- Guidance on cleaning: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/cleaning-prevent-spread-covid-19
- Guidance on PPE: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/general-industry-information/ppe?tab=tab-toc-employer
- Guidance on masks: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/general-industry-information/masks?tab=tab-toc-employer
- Guidance on managing health and safety risks: www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/book/model-code-practice-how-manage-work-health-and-safety-risks

National COVID-19 Coordination Commission

- COVIDSafe resources: www.pmc.gov.au/nccc/resources

State and Territory COVID-19 Information

- Queensland: www.covid-19.qld.gov.au
- New South Wales: www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19
- Victoria: www.vic.gov.au/coronavirus
- Western Australia: www.wa.gov.au
- South Australia: www.covid-19.sa.gov.au
- Australian Capital Territory: www.covid19.act.gov.au
- Northern Territory: www.coronavirus.nt.gov.au
- Tasmania: www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au