



COVID-19 Guidance for Ohio Public Transit and Human Service Transportation Agencies

A. Overview. The Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA) has developed the following guidelines and best practices for public transit and human service (“PT/HS”) transportation agencies during Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The PT/HS guidelines interpret and apply federal and state-issued best practices within the constraints and environmental realities of public transit and human service transportation, based upon the core, driving principle of protecting and preserving the health and safety of our workforces and communities.

Citations to federal and state resources are referenced throughout, and PT/HS agencies should consult these resources regularly, including, but not limited to, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), American Public Transportation Association (APTA), Ohio Department of Health (ODH), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Emergency Management Agencies (EMAs). Public transit authorities should refer to FTA Safety Management System (SMS) regulations when addressing the new environment of risks and hazards presented by COVID-19 (<https://www.transit.dot.gov/PTASP-TAC>).

Recognizing that each PT/HS transportation agency has different and unique circumstances, the manner in which these recommendations are implemented will depend on an agency’s size, mode of operation, geography, and available resources. Implementing any of these recommendations will help reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading among agency staff and riders and can be used in the development/enhancement of agency health and safety plans. OPTA respectfully requests the support of the Ohio Department of Health in distributing and updating, as may be necessary, the following guidelines and best practices for Ohio PT/HS transportation agencies during COVID-19.

This guidance is not intended to be comprehensive for all agencies. For specific questions that arise for each agency, please contact the agency’s responsible funding source.

B. Definition. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a highly contagious respiratory illness which is spread person-to-person via contact with body fluids (e.g., blood, sputum, respiratory droplets) and via contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. People ill with the COVID-19 virus usually have a fever, cough, or shortness of breath. It is spread:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- By touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.

The virus can be spread by people who appear to be well before they develop symptoms or by people who carry the virus and never become ill.

C. OPTA Recommended Best Practices for Public Transit and Human Service Transportation Agencies. OPTA recommends the following best practices, noting that best practices must remain responsive to the needs of the specific communities PT/HS agencies serve while also adapting to the fluid circumstances presented by COVID-19.

Practices may vary from PT/HS agency to agency, based upon local health and safety orders and/or policies enacted by PT/HS governing boards. Accordingly, nothing in these best practices shall be interpreted to preclude individual PT/HS agencies from exceeding any recommendation or guideline contained herein.

D. Four (4) Distinct Areas of Concern:

- 1. Vehicle Operators**
- 2. Passengers**
- 3. Vehicle Sanitization/Procedures**
- 4. Facilities Sanitization/Procedures**

1. Vehicle Operators (or “Operators”)

Per Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, the most common ways for Vehicle Operators to be exposed to COVID-19 on the job are by having close contact with a passenger or coming into contact with a surface touched by a person with COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/rideshare-drivers-for-hire.html>).

- PPE - Effective February 2, 2021, and remaining in effect for the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency, as determined by the CDC, Operators must wear masks while on public conveyances and at transportation hubs in compliance with the CDC federal mask requirement addressing Executive Order 13998 issued by President Biden on January 21, 2021 (<https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/masks/mask-travel-guidance.html>).
- The ODH Director’s Order for Social Distancing, Facial Coverings and Non-Congregating issued on April 5, 2021, extends mask wearing requirements to include operators of taxi, car service, or ride sharing vehicles (<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/publicorders/do-social-distancing-facial-coverings-and-non-congregating.pdf>).
- Recommend that masks be provided by the agency to all employees (<https://www.transit.dot.gov/TransitMaskUp>).
- Recommend agency provide gloves and face shields, if feasible. Further suggest that Operators be permitted to wear appropriate masks of their own, as well as their own gloves if desired. Face shields to be worn in addition to masks, but not alone.
- Communicate PPE and hygiene plan to all Operators. Recommend development of personal hygiene campaign noting:
 - PPE/handwashing available to Operators; benefits of regularly washing hands using proper technique; regularly using hand sanitizer; how to properly wear PPE for maximum effect.
 - Per CDC guidance, it is important "to perform hand hygiene after removing PPE."
 - Hand hygiene should be performed by using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60-95% alcohol or washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after removing PPE (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hand-hygiene.html>).
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and proper disposal of the tissue.
- Also share facility and vehicle sanitization process.
- Recommend Operators wear appropriate and available PPE, including masks, gloves, and face shields when working directly with passengers and when maintaining six (6) feet social distancing is not possible, such as while:
 - Securing a passenger's mobility device in the vehicle.
 - Attaching seat and shoulder belts for a passenger seated in a mobility device.
 - Walking a passenger to and from the door.
 - Collecting fare on vehicles.
- Recommend Operators turn their heads away from passengers while performing the above personal assistance activities and limit talking to essential instructions and assistance prompts only.
- Strongly recommend implementing modified mobility-device securement and client assistance procedures to better protect Operators when/if assisting passengers in the securement process. Some recommended practices include:
 - Prompting the passenger utilizing the mobility device or being assisted to and from the door to wear a mask and turn his/her head towards the window/away from the Operator as the Operator secures the mobility device or assists the passenger to board or alight.
 - Asking the passenger to avoid any sudden sneezes/coughs as much as possible.
 - Asking passenger utilizing the mobility device or being assisted not to speak as the Operator secures the mobility device (avoiding any talking spray from the passenger).
 - Prompting the passenger utilizing the mobility device to wear a mask to reduce risk for potential contamination.
 - Asking the Operator not to speak to the passenger as they secure the passenger (avoiding any talking spray from the Operator).
- Instruct Operators to monitor passenger loads and advise of load capacity to allow passenger spacing, if possible. Notify dispatch, if required, when reaching load capacity.

- Recommend Operators avoid touching surfaces often touched by passengers. However, when required, recommend the use of disposable gloves and access to hand sanitizer while on route. Encourage Operators to carry approved or provided cleaning disinfectant to keep their area sanitized while on route.
- If maintaining “lost and found,” handle “lost and found” items with gloves, limiting exposure to items.
- Most Operators will continue to be involved in fare collection. Recommend Operators use disposable gloves, if required, to assist a passenger with cash. Recommend Operators have access to disposable gloves and hand sanitizer while on route.
- Per CDC guidance, agencies should implement, at minimum, a policy that all employees conduct symptom self-assessments twice each day (beginning and end), including taking their own temperature to monitor for fever of 100.4 or higher and to monitor for other symptoms of COVID-19.
 - Allow employee self-assessments to occur at home, as availability of thermometers varies.
 - If an Operator feels sick with COVID-19 symptoms, he/she should stay home. If an Operator has a fever, he/she is not permitted to come to work.
 - Require staff to follow CDC, state, and local guidance and to self-quarantine after a known exposure to the virus. Align agency policies with CDC guidance.
 - If any employee has COVID-19, or is suspected to have COVID-19, the PT/HS agency must work closely with the local health department to determine an appropriate process for bringing that employee back to work.

2. Passengers

- Effective February 2, 2021, and April 5, 2021, respectively, and remaining in effect for the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency as determined by the CDC and/or ODH, PT/HS agencies must require passengers to wear masks while waiting for, riding, driving, or operating public transportation, a taxi, car service, or a ride sharing vehicle.
 - The agency must ensure it has a policy/procedure in place if an individual claims he/she cannot wear a mask for medical reasons that is compliant with HIPAA and ADA regulations.

- In addition, the agency must communicate this mask requirement to riders and include procedures to handle non-compliance. Post this requirement on all conveyances and at transportation hubs.
- Strongly encourage and recommend that passengers not ride PT/HS transportation while feeling ill or presenting symptoms described in Section B, Definition.
- Encourage social distancing, by using signage, decals, audio messaging, etc., to remind passengers to sit apart from others as feasible and try to minimize use of high touch areas on vehicles.
- Communicate messaging of methods used by the PT/HS agency to ensure the safety of all passengers and Operators via various communication platforms, including, but not limited to, social media, website, internal signage on vehicle, audio messaging on vehicle, and taping off seats to restrict passengers who do not reside together to encourage appropriate social distancing.
- If possible, provide hand sanitizing method for passengers, such as:
 - By installing hand sanitizer dispensers on vehicles and in transit centers or waiting areas.
 - By placing alcohol-based wipes (at least 70% alcohol) near the entrance of vehicles and stations.
 - By encouraging riders to use hand sanitizer before/after entering/alighting from the vehicle or waiting area, if feasible.
- Work closely with local health authorities and local EMAs to prevent spread of COVID-19 through PT/HS transportation.
 - Strongly recommend temporary suspension of transportation for presumed positive COVID-19 cases.
 - Authorize designated employee(s) to assist with contact tracing measures.
 - Strongly recommend quarantine of confirmed positive individuals to include continuation of temporary suspension of PT/HS transportation.

3. Vehicle Sanitization/Procedures

Vehicle types, manufacturers, and capacity vary across the state of Ohio. Each PT/HS agency should establish a maximum capacity to safely transport passengers, based on current COVID-19 conditions, the public's use of facial coverings, and assets available.

- Develop a protocol for cleaning and disinfecting vehicles and components assuming COVID-19 exposure. A good resource for example procedures can be found in the American Public Transportation Association's (APTA's) COVID-19 Transit Guide ([https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19 Transit Guide REVISION-2020 08 11.pdf](https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19%20Transit%20Guide%20REVISION-2020%2008%2011.pdf)).
- Strongly recommend that cleaning and disinfecting be conducted in accordance with the guidance from CDC. A list of products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims is available at: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>.
- Mandatory sanitization, at minimum, nightly when vehicle is out of service.
- Recommend disinfectant/sanitization of high touch areas when vehicle returns to a hub or in between Operator shifts.
- Recommend equipping vehicles with gloves, alcohol-based wipes or spray, and dry paper towels for spot-disinfection and hand-hygiene.
- Recommend installation of plexiglass shields, plastic curtain barriers, or taking other precautions in Operator cabin areas to maintain social distance and/or separation between Operators and passengers, if feasible, that do not restrict visibility to the back of the vehicle.
- Recommend restricting passengers' continual standing within 6-foot radius of Operator during operation of vehicle. Methods of communication include signage, decals, and audio instructions to encourage passengers to move past Operator.
- When applicable, consider designating the first row of seating in transit buses closest to the Operator, normally a securement area, for passengers utilizing a mobility device only. If feasible, restrict first row seating in light transit vehicles and vans.
- Maintain service levels, as necessary and to the degree workforce/fleet availability permits, to enable more effective social distancing on all vehicles, including vehicles providing paratransit and demand response trips.
- Maximize ventilation rates on HVAC system, ensuring it is utilizing fresh air (not recirculated air), and air filters should be changed regularly.

- Crack open windows (when possible) while vehicle is in use.
- Long-term, work with manufacturers to alter filtration systems to adapt to necessitate outside air flow.
- Consider upgrading HVAC system specifications in future bus purchases to increase fresh air flow.
- Share vehicle specific air flow information with Operators.

4. Facility Sanitization/Procedures

As with vehicles, transit facilities widely differ across the state of Ohio and range from bus shelters to park and ride facilities to transit centers with full amenities. Each PT/HS agency should establish a maximum capacity to safely serve passengers as they move through facilities to catch their next transit vehicle, based on current COVID-19 conditions, the public's use of facial coverings, and assets available.

- Develop a protocol for cleaning and disinfecting any facility after a person with confirmed COVID-19 was known to be in the space, consistent with CDC guidelines (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>).
- Strongly recommend that cleaning and disinfecting be conducted in accordance with the guidance from CDC. A list of products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims is available at: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>.
- Establish a maximum capacity at any internal facilities, based on social distancing and/or a percentage of maximum capacity.
- Install plexiglass barriers in customer service workstations, information help desks, and other areas where employees interact with clients and passengers to sell fare or provide in-person assistance.
- Review, and adapt as necessary, any processes, procedures, and policies involving in-person interaction between employees and customers, such as employment interviewing and assessment for paratransit service eligibility, to ensure social distancing is maintained and/or appropriate PPE is provided to employees and customers. For paratransit service eligibility guidance, please see <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/civil-rights-ada/frequently-asked-questions>.

- Recommend frequently touched spaces be sanitized twice per day, depending upon volume of traffic.
- Consider posting “last cleaned” signage.
- Consider establishing, where possible, a fixed flow of foot traffic (i.e., west door entrance only, east door exit only).
- Limit elevator occupancy to match the size of the space (no more than two people on an elevator at one time).
- Recommend sanitization materials available for general public as they move through public spaces to board a vehicle.
- Nightly, when facility is closed, conduct a thorough cleaning to include the use of disinfectant and sanitization products.
- Regularly clean air filtration systems and adjust increased outdoor air circulation, if applicable. Consider installing UV lights in HVAC systems to kill bacteria and viruses.
- Consider propping open high traffic doors to avoid hand touch, if safe to do so.
- Consider shutting-off or taping-off drinking fountains; encourage use of bottle filling stations, sinks, or employees bringing water from home.
- Clean/disinfect toilets, sinks, and floors as frequently as practical, especially for restrooms used by a larger population.

For additional safety measures, the FTA provides a broad spectrum for guidance and recommendations. Visit: [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Resource Tool for Public Transportation](#).



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