

# **Safer transport guidance for public transport operators in Northern Ireland during coronavirus (COVID-19)**

## **Contents**

1. Introduction
2. Risk assessment
3. Workforce planning
4. Social distancing
5. Face coverings
6. Cleaning
7. Ventilation
8. Communications
9. Making services accessible for people with disabilities and other equality groups
10. Operating outside Northern Ireland
11. Further links

**(Version 8) Updated on 8 March 2022**

# 1. Introduction

This guidance will help public transport operators understand how to provide safer workplaces and services for themselves, their staff and passengers. It outlines measures to assess and address the risks of COVID-19 in the public transport sector across Northern Ireland.

## Key Messages

For public transport operators this means:

- Preparing a COVID-19 risk assessment in collaboration with staff and trade unions to manage the risk of transmission.
- Following the latest working from home guidance.
- Having suitable mitigation measures in place where it is not possible to maintain at least one metre social distance.
- Enhancing cleaning processes and ensuring good ventilation.
- Recommending passengers and staff (unless behind a protective screen) wear a face covering when on public transport.
- Communicating safety measures to staff and passengers and making clear what is expected of them.

Each public transport provider will need to translate the principles and examples in this guidance into specific actions. It must be considered alongside legal duties and other guidance produced by the government and the relevant transport regulators.

## 2. Risk assessment

Under applicable health and safety law, public transport operators, as employers, must carry out a risk assessment to manage hazards in the workplace. COVID-19 is a workplace hazard. You should manage it in the same way as other workplace hazards.

This includes:

- completing a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks of COVID-19 in the workplace
- identifying control measures to manage that risk

The Health & Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) provides a blank [template](#)<sup>5</sup> that can be used to record the findings of a risk assessment. Failure to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment and put in place sufficient control measures to manage the risk may be considered a breach of health and safety law.

It is important to remember that all existing non-COVID-19 related health and safety requirements continue to apply. The HSENI and other transport regulators can help you comply with health and safety legislation.

## **Sharing the results of your risk assessment**

You should share the results of your risk assessment with your workforce. If possible, consider publishing the results on your website to show employees and passengers that you have:

- properly assessed their risk
- taken appropriate measures to mitigate identified risks

## **Reviewing your risk assessment**

Risk assessments should be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain relevant and appropriate under changing circumstances. In particular, risk assessments should be reviewed in line with any changing public health advice in relation to the virus, for example, the emergence of a new variant or an increased risk or rate of transmission.

## **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

If your risk assessment shows that PPE is required, then you must provide this PPE free of charge to workers who need it. Any PPE provided must be of a sufficient PPE standard to protect the wearer and must fit properly. Where employees are already using PPE in their work activity to protect against non-COVID-19 risks, they should continue to do so.

### **3. Workforce planning**

Public transport operators should remain aware of the latest guidance in relation to working from home and facilitate staff to work from home where required and appropriate.

If staff are in the workplace, operators should implement measures to reduce the risk of transmission, including measures to facilitate the social distancing requirements in place.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): staying safe at work | nidirect](#)

#### **Supporting staff**

Operators should continue to recognise that for some people, such as older people and those with an underlying health condition, COVID-19 can be more serious. Operators may need to take additional measures to protect those at higher risk. You should discuss any concerns individuals may have around their particular circumstances and reassure them about the protective measures in place.

Consider providing support for workers around mental health and wellbeing. This could include guidance or telephone support from both within the organisation and from external support organisations and charities.

Remember, as an employer, you are still under legal obligations to ensure the decisions you make in response to coronavirus (COVID-19) do not directly or indirectly discriminate against employees.

### **4. Social distancing**

Both staff and passengers should keep one metre distance from others where possible.

If it is not possible to keep a one metre distance, for example: when getting on or off public transport; on busier services; at busier times of day; and when walking through stations; suitable mitigation measures must be used to reduce the risk.

You should consider and set out in your risk assessment the mitigations you

already have in place or will introduce, for example to:

- Create and agree a single, clear approach to social distancing for all workers and passengers.
- Use face coverings and other mitigation measures in situations where social distancing is not possible.
- Eliminate face-to-face seating where possible, for example, shift to 'bench' style.
- Consider making hand sanitiser available on board vehicles and at stations.
- Use screens to create a physical barrier between people where appropriate, such as in ticket offices or on vehicles.
- Introduce one-way flow through areas and vehicles where possible.
- Revise maximum occupancy for lifts and ways of operating lifts, remaining mindful of customers' needs.
- Increase surface cleaning.
- Advising people to avoid shouting or other activities that may result in an increased dispersal of airborne droplets.
- Consider whether queues can be moved to locations with more space for safe queues.
- Use social media, apps and other digital methods to alert passengers of busier times of the day and busier services.

## **5. Face coverings**

Wearing a face covering plays an important role in helping us to protect each other. Although face coverings may not prevent someone from becoming infected with the virus, they help prevent people who don't know they have the virus spreading it to others, protecting passengers and staff.

Although wearing a face covering is no longer a legal requirement, they are still strongly recommended when using indoor areas where you come into

contact with people you do not usually meet.

Passengers should therefore wear a face covering when on bus, coach, rail and community transport services, and indoors areas on ferry services, in line with public health advice.

Operators can encourage the use of face coverings through the use of posters, social media, on-board announcements and other communication channels, reminding passengers of the public health advice.

## **Staff requirements to wear a face covering**

While it is no longer a legal requirement, employees should wear a face covering when they are performing duties on a public transport service or in a public area of a station. Staff are not required to wear a face covering in non-public areas of a station unless the risk assessment of the operator determines that they should be worn. Staff are also not required to wear a face covering where they are physically separated by way of a partition from passengers by means of, for example, a protective screen.

It is important to consider the impact staff wearing face coverings may have on different equality groups. People who are deaf or who have hearing loss rely heavily on visual cues for effective communication. These include body language, gestures, facial expressions and lip reading. Being able to see lip patterns and facial expressions is also vital for those who communicate through sign language.

As well as considering the use of transparent face coverings where possible, there are simple options that will improve the accessibility of services for those who are deaf or have hearing loss. These include adopting communication tips to ensure understanding when wearing PPE; using screens where possible; utilizing the [Virtual Relay Service](#)<sup>25</sup>; using written information as well as verbal and temporarily removing the face covering to communicate (within the current social distancing guidelines).

## **6. Cleaning**

Touch points (for example buttons to open doors, hand rails) across the transport network should be particular areas of focus for increased cleaning.

Organisations should follow [guidance on cleaning and waste disposal](#)<sup>5</sup> and implement cleaning protocols to limit COVID-19 transmission and consider who will carry out the cleaning activity.

## **Keeping public areas and vehicles clean**

Keep public areas and vehicles clean and prevent the transmission of COVID-19 as a result of touching contaminated surfaces.

Organisations could:

- Identify higher risk areas such as areas that are touched more regularly.
- Supply standard cleaning products for regular cleaning and make sure there are adequate disposal arrangements for used cleaning products.
- Clean regularly-touched objects and surfaces (like door handles, handrails and ticket machines) more often than usual using standard cleaning products.
- Encourage workers to wash hands before boarding vehicles.
- Retain sufficient quantities of hand sanitiser/wipes within vehicles to enable workers to clean hands regularly throughout their shift.
- Use wipes to clean fuel pumps before and after use.
- Clean vehicle keys before and after handling.

## **7. Ventilation**

Organisations should consider how to increase ventilation and air flow. Where possible, transport operators and businesses should ensure that a fresh air supply is consistently flowing through vehicles, carriages, stations and office buildings. To achieve this, organisations could consider:

- Air conditioning. Most air conditioning systems do not need adjustment,

however where systems serve multiple buildings or you are unsure, advice could be sought from HVAC engineers.

- Fresh ventilation systems, which can operate as normal.
- Adjusting recirculating air systems to increase fresh air flow where appropriate.
- High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filtration.
- Opening doors and windows where possible and safe to do so.

## 8. Communications

Operators should keep workers and passengers informed of the latest COVID-19-related safety procedures.

For workers, organisations could:

- Engage with workers through unions, work councils and other workers' bodies to quickly explain and agree any changes in working arrangements.
- Communicate clearly and regularly to improve understanding and consistency of how new ways of working should be applied.
- Communicate and deliver training materials on new procedures. Use posters and announcements to remind workers to wash their hands often and follow general hygiene advice.
- Demonstrate awareness and focus on the importance of mental health at times of uncertainty. For further information see [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): taking care of your mental health and wellbeing](#)<sup>5</sup>.

For passengers and travellers operators could:

- Communicate with passengers through social media and websites, display signs and make regular announcements to help passengers understand what they need to do to travel safely.
- Provide passengers with information on timetables, expected journey times, expected capacity (accounting for social distancing), delays and

changes to normal routes or practices.

- Use posters and announcements to remind travellers and passengers to wash their hands often and follow general hygiene advice.
- Promote electronic ticket purchases and/or contactless payments.
- Provide clear information on any changes to assistance services for different equality groups, for example disabled people, the elderly and pregnant women, explaining how they can continue to access transport in a safe way.
- Use simple, clear and accessible messaging to explain guidelines and any changes in processes and procedures and consider publishing information for the general public in a range of alternative formats e.g. easy read.

## **9. Making services accessible for people with disabilities and other equality groups**

Public transport operators have legal obligations to ensure the decisions they make in response to coronavirus (COVID-19) do not directly or indirectly discriminate against people from certain equality groups.

Designated public authorities are also required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between people in relation to nine specific categories <sup>1</sup> and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between people in relation to three specific categories <sup>2</sup>.

This means you must assess the impact of any revised arrangements on different equality groups such as Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people, those with children, pregnant women, older people and people with disabilities.

---

<sup>1</sup> The nine equality of opportunity categories are people of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation, men and women generally, people who are disabled and those who are not and people who have dependents and those without.

<sup>2</sup> The three good relations categories are people of different religious belief, political opinion, and racial group.

Public transport operators should:

- Develop clear guidelines to support and assist passengers with disabilities and other equality groups in consultation with service users and representative groups.
- Ensure that consideration is given to meeting the needs of passengers from different equality groups, including making reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities.
- Consider that some groups may be impacted differently by measures to manage queues, protect passenger flows or maintain social distance and may need particular help to enable them to access public transport and information about the arrangements that are in place.
- Provide guidance and training for all workers on assisting different equality groups including people with disabilities.
- Ensure information on changes to assistance or services for different equality groups is communicated in an accessible format suitable for everyone including people with visual impairment, people who are deaf or have hearing loss, people with learning difficulties, people who do not have access to electronic media or whose first language is not English.

For further advice on meeting the needs of older people and people with disabilities, operators should contact the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC).

For further advice on your duty to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities contact the Equality Commission's helpline on 028 90 500 600 and ask for the Advisory Services Team, or e-mail [edenquiries@equalityni.org](mailto:edenquiries@equalityni.org).

RNIB NI and Guide Dogs NI have developed guidance on social distancing for blind and partially sighted people in Northern Ireland, aimed at raising awareness among the wider public and service providers: [NI Social Distancing Guidelines – how you can support Blind and Partially Sighted people](#) <sup>5</sup>.

## 10. Operating outside Northern Ireland

This guidance is primarily focussed on public transport in Northern Ireland. Organisations should consider this guidance when operating services arriving into or departing from Northern Ireland.

Operators should adhere to legal requirements and guidance set by other governments when operating in other countries or regions, including the Republic of Ireland.

## 11. Further links

- Advice for businesses and workers during Coronavirus (COVID-19): [Coronavirus updates: Support for your business](#) <sup>☐</sup>
- Safer travel guidance for public transport users: [Safer travel guidance for public transport users | nidirect](#)
- COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Recovery Plan for Northern Ireland: [Building Forward: Consolidated Covid-19 Recovery Plan](#) <sup>☐</sup>