

MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPERATORS

FEBRUARY | 2020

OBJECTIVE

These guidelines have been prepared in February 2020 in the framework of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. They aim to assist public transport operators in tailoring business continuity plans responding to the specific challenges of communicable diseases.



CONTEXT

According to the WHO, the new coronavirus is a respiratory virus, which spreads primarily through contact with an infected person through respiratory droplets generated by coughing or sneezing, which can be inhaled or contaminate hands and surfaces. It is still unknown how the virus can survive on surfaces, but preliminary information suggests that it may last a few hours or more.

Public transport systems have to be considered a high-risk environment due to:

- high number of people in a confined space with limited ventilation;
- no access control to identify potentially sick persons;
- a variety of common surfaces to touch (ticket machines, handrails, door knobs, etc.).

Public transport is an essential service to provide mobility, also in times of pandemics, not least to provide access to health care facilities. Shutting down public transport would constitute an extreme measure to be taken by the authorities in the framework of a wider crisis management plan. The key objective for public transport operators therefore has to be maintaining the operation. Consequently, public transport operators should focus their pandemic plan efforts on staff, trying to protect them and preparing to deal with absenteeism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The most important recommendation is to follow the guidance of the competent authorities at all times and to scale up measures according to the risk level.

PREPAREDNESS

The recommendations on preparedness are suitable for all public transport networks, regardless of the level of threat currently faced.

It is important to acknowledge that pandemic planning is not a stand-alone project, but should be integrated with existing crisis management structures and procedures in order to be effective. It is crucial to involve business units directly into this planning, as they know best themselves, which are critical supplies, personnel or functions. It is advisable to involve unions into the planning and decision-making process at a very early stage; their true involvement can help to achieve an understanding and support for less popular measures.

- It is crucial to have identified **essential functions** within the organisation and provide separate facilities for them if needed;
- It is advisable to develop an inventory of staff qualifications, licenses, etc. in order to identify employees, who could act as **back up for critical positions**. As many professional licenses are expiring without regular practice or re-examination, it is also important to check their validity and renew them if needed;
- Review the stock and availability of **essential protection and cleaning equipment and supplies** and plan their distribution and refill;
- Review **stock and supply chains** for operational material, such as fuel, lubricants or spare parts and investigate alternative suppliers if possible;
- **Staff information** is a key element of communication planning and reassurance is needed, as a major disease outbreak will be a key topic within media and public discussion. It is considered a useful tool to develop a basic “questions and answers” section for the internal websites providing basic information for employees about the outbreak, its impact on the public transport systems and measures being taken. (see below Annex 1 “Sample communication messages for public transport operator staff”);
- Follow related **communications of the responsible authorities** to stay informed on latest advise for your country or region.

PERSONAL PROTECTION

Personal protection measures are suitable for all public transport networks regardless of risk level. Note that it may be useful to be seen to increase personal protection and hygiene measures to reassure both staff and passengers even if the risk is considered very low.

As a general measure, staff should be reminded of required basic rules of personal hygiene, which includes to regularly wash hands, to sneeze and cough into the elbow and to use paper towels. Information bulletins are widely available and should be displayed throughout the premises.

- Staff wash and dressing rooms, meeting rooms and offices should be equipped with hand disinfectants and paper tissues;
- The effect of respiratory masks is debated. Public transport operators should obtain local and/or national advice on the use of masks and recommended types of masks. General advice of the WHO is to wear masks when tending to an infected or potentially infected person;
- Cleaning routines may have to be adapted and increased focus should be put on disinfecting common surfaces and spots to touch as well as waste disposal. For working places, where no cleaning may be possible between shifts, employees should be equipped with the necessary means and be made responsible to remove any waste and disinfect surfaces before taking over as part of the routine;
- Staff that has to tend sick travellers, clean body fluids or potentially contaminated items and surfaces, should wear disposable gloves.



REDUCTION OF CONTACT

Reduction of contact measures are recommended if the risk level is high, for example confirmed outbreak in the area or a decision by the competent authorities.

Whilst hard to realise in the operational environment, the following options could be considered to reduce the exposure of public transport staff:

- **Customer service staff** should only be available in information booths or desks with sufficient distance to passengers;
- **Rear door boarding** may temporarily replace the front door access of buses, in order to protect drivers that have no separate cabins;
- The need for **ticket inspection** during an outbreak should be challenged. Ticket inspectors would be exposed to a very high risk of getting infected, whilst they may be valuable back-up staff for other critical positions;
- **Remote working** should be considered for activities that could be carried out without physically being present in company premises. The stimulation of home working might further contribute to reducing contact and might allow working for employees, who have to take care of relatives at home but are not sick;
- Replacing meetings by telephone conferences should reduce **contact between employees**, the closing of canteens may be considered.

REDUCED SERVICE

Reduced service measures may be required if the risk level is high, for example a confirmed outbreak in the area or a decision by the competent authorities.

If staff availability becomes too low to sustain regular operation, service should be reduced throughout the network as a pandemic is expected to affect a region without focus. It should be noted that such reduction of service will likely correspond with a reduced travel demand due to closing of schools and general advise to stay at home if possible.

- Operators have good experiences with the adoption of the **weekend timetable** as passengers are used to it and necessary announcements are already prepared, thus the service amendment might cause the minimal confusion;

- **Maintenance routines** for equipment and rolling stock should be reviewed in order to identify the potential for advancing or delaying inspections;
- Operators should **seek contact with local authorities** to align crisis plans as an epidemic might lead to limited availabilities on their side.

CLOSING REMARKS

Public transport is a backbone of local and national economy and an essential service to be maintained as long as reasonable. As of now, the COVID-19 outbreak has not been declared a pandemic, but as we see cases confirmed in a growing number of countries, the situation in any region can change rapidly.

Preparedness is thus the most helpful measure at this stage in most places. Examples of ways to be prepared as well as references to useful websites and documents have been collected by UITP Secretariat to support its members in this process (Annex 2).

It is important to follow the information given by WHO, staying in close contact with the national health organisations and authorities and following their guidelines.

REFERENCES

1. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
2. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

ANNEX 1 - SAMPLE COMMUNICATION MESSAGES FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPERATOR STAFF (TO BE UPDATED TO LOCAL SITUATION)

The following examples of messages have been shared as part of some good practices to inform employees in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak.

MESSAGE FOR CONCERNED EMPLOYEES WHO APPROACH HR SERVICES

We understand your concern, but no infection with the new coronavirus has yet been found in the [COUNTRY]. We naturally follow developments closely and there is regular contact with the responsible ministries, for example. On [name of your intranet] you will find more general information and a link to the websites of WHO and the responsible authority for Public Health of [COUNTRY]. They ensure that everyone is kept informed of current developments.

MESSAGE FOR COLLEAGUES WORKING AT CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER

[COMPANY] closely follows the developments of the new coronavirus and follows the guidelines given by the Ministry of Health and/or the responsible authority for Public Health of [COUNTRY]. At present, no infection with the new coronavirus has yet been found in [COUNTRY]. There are therefore no additional measures in force. Look at the website of the authority for Public Health of the [COUNTRY] for all information about the new coronavirus.

MESSAGE ON THE ELECTRONIC SCREENS IN ALL COMPANY VENUES

The new coronavirus and [COMPANY]

Media is full of it: the current developments of the new coronavirus around the world. Although the virus has not yet been found in the [COUNTRY], many companies and organisations are preparing. [COMPANY] is also very aware of this. For example, we maintain close ties with the Ministry of

Health and the responsible authority for Public Health of the [COUNTRY]. Our colleagues at the Airport have very regular consultations with the airport authorities. Coordination also takes place with other carriers. There are no additional measures in place for our daily practice. On [name of your intranet] we have listed some general information for you.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE NEW CORONAVIRUS ON [NAME OF YOUR INTRANET]

We have listed the general information about the new coronavirus and used the information as it is on the website of the authority for Public Health of the [COUNTRY]. The “authority for Public Health of the [COUNTRY]” works closely together with WHO. There you will find much more and especially the most up-to-date information.

In the Wuhan region of China there is an outbreak of a new coronavirus. Most patients have fever and respiratory complaints. The Chinese authorities are currently investigating the coronavirus and the source of the infections and are taking measures to prevent further spread of the virus. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak an international threat to public health.

NUMBER OF PATIENTS WITH NEW CORONAVIRUS

The Chinese health authorities indicate that there are now thousands of patients in China. More than four hundred people have died as a result of the virus. Most patients come from the Wuhan region or have been in the Wuhan region. In other countries, such as Thailand, Japan, the United States and France, the new coronavirus was found among some travelers who had recently been to the Wuhan region. In Italy, the virus was detected with about 200 people in the Northern regions.

SYMPTOMS NEW CORONAVIRUS

People with the new coronavirus have a fever and respiratory complaints. Think of cough, nose cold, sore throat or pneumonia. This new coronavirus

differs from the known coronaviruses that occur in humans.

CONTAGIOUSNESS

The disease can be transmitted from person to person. It is not well known how contagious the virus is and how fast it spreads. The WHO and the Chinese government chart the situation day by day. More will become clear about infectivity in the coming period. Contamination will not take place through parcels, letters, money, etc., since the virus does not survive outside the body.

CHANCE OF A NEW CORONAVIRUS IN THE [COUNTRY]

It is possible that the virus can be detected in a person in the [COUNTRY]. Probably in that case it will be someone who has recently been to the Wuhan region. Or it is about someone who has been in contact with someone who was infected with the new coronavirus. In Germany a number of people became infected with the new coronavirus after contact with a patient.

HYGIENE MEASURES

To ensure that you have as little contact with pathogens as possible, you can also take various hygiene measures into account. Think of regularly washing hands, sneezing and coughing on the inside of your elbow and the use of paper tissues. Detailed information is available on the website of “the authority for Public Health of the [COUNTRY]”.

TRAVEL ADVICE

The WHO has indicated that no additional measures are currently required for travelers to China. In general, the advice applies to travelers to avoid markets with live animals and to take hygiene measures depending on the circumstances. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides current travel advice for China.

ANNEX 2 - CASE STUDIES AND PRACTICES AGAINST COVID-19 AND ADDITIONAL REFERENCES FOR MANAGEMENT OF VIRUS OUTBREAKS

As it will be updated on a regular basis, please look for [this document directly on MyLibrary](#) in the dedicated “Thematic Files” section on COVID-19.



DIGITAL VERSION AVAILABLE ON
 MYLIBRARY

This is an official Factsheet **available only for members of UITP**, the International Association of Public Transport. UITP has more than 1,800 member companies in 100 countries throughout the world and represents the interests of key players in this sector. Its membership includes transport authorities, operators, both private and public, in all modes of collective passenger transport, and the industry. UITP addresses the economic, technical, organisation and management aspects of passenger transport, as well as the development of policy for mobility and public transport worldwide.