

# Public Transportation

## During Corona Pandemic

Health Committee, Non-Resident Nepali Association

### OBJECTIVE

Public transportation is an essential service for mobility. Travelers and public transport operators need to adapt safety measures to avoid getting infected with Corona virus.

As public places and businesses are opening in Nepal and in other parts of the world, it is important to resume daily activities as safely as possible to avoid getting infected from Corona virus. Currently, the risk of infection remains high in majority of the countries including in Nepal, we need to adopt different all types prevention methods to protect ourselves and help others. For majority of health topics, including public transportation, you need to follow guidelines from the health ministry, health agency or the national health organizations of the country where you reside as well as from World Health Organization (WHO). But this guideline will give you additional information.

Direct person-to-person transmission of the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is thought to occur through close-range contact, mainly via droplets coming out of respiratory tract like cough and sneeze. Beside these, viruses on heavily contaminated surfaces (e.g. rooms used by

infected individual, hospital wards where individuals with Corona are treated etc.), public transport are major source of infection. The viruses survive mostly up to 24 hours depending on the types of surfaces they are in (few days in hard surfaces and few hours in porous surfaces like paper and fabrics) though the exact time virus are still being researched.

### CONTEXT

Public transportation system in Nepal (buses, mini-vans, mini buses) and in several densely populated cities of the worlds (trains, metros and subways) are a high-risk environment because:

- high number of people in a confined space with limited ventilation
- compact seating arrangement in transportation vehicles like microbus, local bus, etc.
- tendency of public transportation services to overcrowd vehicles
- no access to control measures in identifying potentially sick person
- many surfaces being common to public touches (ticket counters, seats, handrails, doorknobs, etc.).

### POLICY, PROTOCOL AND PREPAREDNESS

Governments, decision makers, the transport organizations and unions of buses, trains, underground transport systems and passenger rights and advocacy group should work closely to plan and decide the safety measures ahead of time for all public transport systems (buses, mini-buses, trams, trains, underground transportation systems):

- Avoid filling up the vehicle and allow only 30%-50% of vehicle capacity to help maintain the social distancing among travelers.

- Limit the number of passengers in the vehicle to only those that can be transported safely at minimal or no risk of transmission.
- At the transportation service office, staff should be reminded of required basic rules of personal hygiene.
- Information bulletins should be made widely available and displayed throughout the premises.
- Staff washrooms, dressing rooms, meeting rooms and offices should be equipped with hand disinfectants and paper tissues.
- Contactless ticketing system via mobile pay should be encouraged, to avoid the need to handle cash that could act as means to transmit the virus.
- Pooled rides or picking up multiple passengers (in Taxi, Uber, Lyft, Pathao, Tootle) should limit their passengers.
- Improve the ventilation in the vehicle if possible (for example, open or set the air ventilation/air conditioning on non-recirculation mode).
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces regularly (for example, the steering wheel, gear shift, door frame/handles, windows, radio/temperature dials, seatbelt buckles etc).
- Buses, taxi drivers or private hire vehicle operators should be allowed to refuse passengers who do not have face mask on.
- Review the stock and availability of essential protection and cleaning equipment and supplies. Plan their distribution and refill.



- Staff information is a key element of communication as planning and reassurance is needed for everyone's safety.
- Passenger behavior on vehicles, at stops and station should be studied and accordingly modified to make operational changes and to promote compliance.
- Service measures may require reduction or temporary withholding if the risk level is high, for example a confirmed outbreak in the area.

#### ADVISE FOR THE TRAVELERS

- Walk or cycle if you can.
- Plan your route, including any breaks, before setting out. Routes may be different as local areas make changes to enable social distancing.
- It is unfeasible to avoid contact with surfaces while traveling in public vehicle. However, avoid unnecessary contact in order to keep oneself safe.
- In circumstances where such contact is unavoidable, use a hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol as soon as possible afterwards.
- Cover your face with medical or cloth mask or make your own using 100% cotton clothes.



- Wait for passengers to get off first before you board. Respect other people's space.
- Avoid accepting offers of free water bottles and avoid touching magazines or other items that may be provided for free to passengers.
- Use touchless payment when available.
- Avoid pooled rides or rides where multiple passengers from different household are picked up. If you cannot avoid, then wear masks on these rides, do not talk with or touch co-passenger and wash your hands thoroughly with soap before touching your face.
- Sit in the back seat in larger vehicles such as vans and buses so you can remain at least six feet away from the driver.
- Stay updated by checking with local transit authorities for the latest information on changes into services and procedures, especially when you need assistance.
- Avoid carrying unnecessary baggage.
- We recommend elderly, sick, pregnant women or high-risk individuals including children to avoid using public transportation as much as possible.
- Practice hand hygiene (not touching nose and mouth before washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds) all the time.

#### GENERAL PERSONAL PROTECTION

We recommend the following steps to avoid infection for all travelers.

1. Wear mask all the time. Make your own mask using 100 percent cloth if you cannot one.

2. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (hand hygiene) after touching the suspected surfaces.
3. Sneeze and cough into elbows.
4. Disinfect places and areas that are frequently touched like doorknobs.
5. Maintain social distance of 6 ft all the time.
6. If you are sick or have symptoms (fever, cough, or shortness of breath) stay home and avoid socialization.
7. Immediately get consultations from doctor or from the health-line, get tested to be sure about your infection status.
8. One should isolate themselves immediately if recommended by health authorities.
9. One must stay vigilant as there is global pandemic going on. People and businesses should be prepared to act fast to step up if things get worse.
10. Some people are at more risk of serious illness from Corona infections than others and should take extra precautions to stay safe.

#### REMARKS

Public transport is the backbone of local and national economy and an essential service. While we are still struggling with the pandemic, these preventive measures need to be adhered to religiously.

