



COVID-19 Pandemic Guidance for Multi-day Road-based Tours

Revised June 3, 2021

Purpose

The National Park Service (NPS) is issuing this guidance to inform operators and those that oversee operators of multi-day road-based tours who visit units of the National Park System (System units) of COVID-19-related public-health requirements and guidelines. These tour operators provide trips for passengers that may be several days to more than a week in duration and travel from destination to destination. These may be operated by commercial companies or by a non-profit entity. Tour vehicles may range in size from passenger vans that carry ten or fewer passengers to larger motorcoaches that have the capability to carry 50 passengers or more.

Separate guidance titled Transportation System Operations: COVID-19 Management Practices is available that focuses on transportation services for various conveyances including land-based vehicles, boats, and aircraft providing shorter trips to or through System units.

The information contained in this document is provided as a resource for parks and visitor service providers to assist them in operating in System units. It is based upon currently available information. Operators are independently responsible for understanding and complying with the most current applicable laws, regulations, orders, ordinances, and other legal requirements and for conducting their operations in a manner that is safe and protects the health of employees, customers, and the public.

Background

On January 20, 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order (EO) #13991: [Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing](#) setting a clear goal of halting the spread of COVID-19 by relying on the best available data and science which includes the wearing of face masks while around others, maintaining physical distance from others whenever possible, and adhering to guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Additionally, on January 22, 2021, the President signed EO #13998: [Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel](#). On January 29, 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a nationwide order implementing aspects of EO #13998 titled "[Requirement for Persons to Wear Masks While on Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs](#)" (Order), effective on February 1, 2021, at 11:59 p.m. When operating in System units, multi-day road-based tour operators must comply with the CDC Order as well as all other applicable legal requirements.

In addition to complying with all applicable requirements when they are on the vehicle, multi-day road-based tour operators and passengers must comply with all applicable requirements when they off the vehicle. A full suite of COVID-19 requirements and guidelines for commercial visitor service providers operating in national parks can be found on the [COVID-19 Information for Partners](#) page on nps.gov.

States and localities may have their own public-health requirements regarding COVID-19 that multi-day road-based tour providers must comply with as they travel through those jurisdictions. Except for units of the National

Park System under exclusive federal jurisdiction, those state and local public-health requirements continue to apply to multi-day road-based tour operators and passengers when they enter a System unit unless the NPS superintendent has adopted and implemented different requirements. All such requirements will be memorialized in administrative orders issued by the superintendent under 36 C.F.R. § 1.5 and will be posted on the park's website.

At their discretion, tour operators may implement their own requirements based upon industry standards or company policy that exceed the legal requirements.

COVID-19 Management Practices for Multi-day Road-based Tours

This guidance document briefly describes some of the federal legal requirements related to COVID-19 that apply to operators of multi-day road-based tours in System units; it also describes some recommended management practices that the NPS encourages tour operators to implement. States and localities may have enacted or imposed additional legal requirements that apply to tour operators. Tour operators must be familiar with all applicable legal requirements.

According to the NPS's Office of Public Health, multi-day road-based tours have characteristics that could present particular COVID-19 risks for park visitors. Passengers are traveling in enclosed vehicles, in larger groups, in relatively close contact potentially without physical distancing, for an extended period of time, and from location to location. As a result, they have higher potential to acquire illness and spread it among themselves than in other types of commercial visitor services. Conversely, since the passengers travel as a cohesive group, tour operators may be able to implement and apply mitigation measures, such as regular screening and testing, that are not feasible for other commercial service providers.

Face Masks

Regardless of vaccination status, all persons on multi-day, road-based tours, including all passengers, guides, and drivers, must comply with the CDC Order and, unless excluded or exempted by the Order, must wear masks "while boarding, disembarking, or traveling on any conveyance into or within the United States." All persons must also wear masks "at any transportation hub that provide transportation within the United States." Consistent with the CDC's [Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People \(updated as of May 28, 2021\)](#), fully vaccinated visitors to federal buildings and federal lands are no longer required to wear masks; however, visitors who are not fully vaccinated still must wear masks.

Multi-day road-based tour operators must use best efforts to ensure that all passengers, including those who are fully vaccinated, wear a mask to comply with the CDC Order. Tour operators must:

- Notify people in advance of the tour of the requirement to make sure they are aware of the requirement to wear a mask;
- Board only people who wear masks;
- Instruct people on the tour that wearing a mask is a requirement of federal law and that not complying with the requirement is a violation of federal law;
- Provide a supply of masks on-board for use by those on the tour if requested;
- Monitor the vehicle for any person who is not wearing a mask and seek compliance from such a person;
- At the earliest safe opportunity, require any person who refuses to comply to leave the tour.

While on a multi-day road based tour, people are not required to wear a mask under the following circumstances:

- While eating, drinking, or taking medication for brief periods of time and while maintaining at least six feet of distance from others;
- While communicating, for brief periods of time and while maintaining at least six feet of distance from others, with a person who is hearing impaired when the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication;
- If unconscious, incapacitated, unable to be awakened, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance;
- When necessary to temporarily remove the mask to verify one's identity.

The following categories of people are exempt from the requirement to wear a mask:

- A child under the age of 2 years;
- A person for whom wearing a mask would create a risk to workplace health, safety, or job duty as determined by the relevant workplace safety guidelines or federal regulations.

The NPS recognizes some visitors may have health-related reasons for not wearing masks. Although the NPS is not authorized to exempt individuals from wearing masks due to disabilities or other medical conditions, NPS staff, volunteers, and concessioners should work with those individuals to provide alternative means of accessing facilities, activities, and services when possible.

Wearing a mask throughout the trip when on the vehicle in accordance with federal requirements can help prevent travelers from acquiring disease and potentially transmitting it to others when they enter the park. While the NPS has no jurisdictional authority when multi-day road-based tours are outside the park, the NPS assumes tour operators will comply with the federal requirement throughout the trip.

Physical Distancing, Occupancy, and Group Size

CDC's [guidelines on protecting yourself when using transportation](#) identify physical distancing as a key defense in the spread of COVID-19. The CDC recommends that unvaccinated people maintain a distance of at least six feet (about two arms' length) from other people. While such practices are encouraged, the Department of the Interior has determined that the physical distancing standards are not practicable on transportation systems in System units. The NPS will no longer apply strict physical distancing standards for multi-day road-based tours. Tours that have been required to operate in System units at reduced capacity in order to ensure enough space for riders to physically distance from one another may return to full capacity operations. Practices that limit capacity of tour vehicles such as closing alternate rows of seating or limiting occupancy below established vehicle or vessel capacities may be discontinued.

Although the NPS will generally no longer require this practice in System units, NPS superintendents may still require physical distancing when it is determined necessary to protect human health or to align with local or state public health requirements. To implement and enforce such requirements, superintendents will issue administrative orders in accordance with 36 C.F.R. § 1.5 and will provide public notice of the requirements in accordance with 36 C.F.R. § 1.7. Additionally, tour operators may independently employ physical distancing as a COVID-19 prevention measure or may determine instead to use other COVID-19 prevention measures, such as providing enhanced vehicle ventilation systems, screening, testing and/or vaccination.

Vehicle Modifications

Although not required by federal law, multi-day road-based tour operators should also consider the following vehicle modifications/improvements to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19:

- Improving conveyance ventilation systems.
- Installing a clear, protective barrier (e.g. plexiglass) between the vehicle operator and the passengers.
- Providing “hand hygiene stations” at the vehicle door.

Vehicle Cleaning Requirements

Regular cleaning and disinfecting of vehicles is necessary to ensure the safety of visitors and vehicle operators. Multi-day road-based tour operators should abide by CDC cleaning and disinfecting guidelines as the minimum standard for cleaning including those for [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#) and [Cleaning and Disinfection for Non-emergency Transport Vehicles](#). If there is a known or suspected case of a passenger or operator with COVID-19, immediately remove the vehicle from operation and follow the CDC guidelines for cleaning.

Multi-day road-based tour operators should also consider establishing and using a vetting and selection process to confirm that the vehicle provider’s cleaning and sanitizing standards are known and implemented and implementing a rigorous cleaning regime during the tour with particular emphasis on bathrooms and frequently touched surfaces.

Quarantine, Screening and Testing and Vaccination

Multi-day road-based tour operators should establish procedures for the tour to isolate tour guides and passengers if someone exhibits [symptoms of illness consistent with COVID-19](#), and quarantine those that came in close contact with the individual in accordance with [NPS guidelines](#) and [CDC guidelines](#).

In order to help maintain the health of the tour group, multi-day road-based tour operators may establish additional screening, testing and vaccination COVID-19 prevention practices. These may include the following:

- Requiring vaccination of tour operators and passengers.
- Requiring unvaccinated passengers to quarantine before the trip.
- Requiring unvaccinated passengers to obtain a negative viral test one to three days before the trip per CDC [guidelines for travel during COVID-19](#).
- Requiring the driver, tour guide and passengers to self-screen for symptoms daily and obtain testing if symptoms occur.
- Conducting COVID-19 testing for the driver, tour guide and passengers periodically during the trip; maintain health records available for public health officials if requested; maintain records in accordance with applicable laws.
- Reporting and Contact Tracing and Investigation

The NPS’s ability to quickly track known and suspected COVID-19 cases is critical to maintaining the health of NPS employees, partner personnel, and park visitors. The potential to quickly trace and investigate possible disease could prevent transmission within the park community and help avoid overwhelming local health facilities. Multi-day road-based tour operators should:

- Maintain a complete and accurate passenger manifest with contact information for each person.
- Maintain screening, testing or other health records collected during the tour available for public health officials if requested.
- Maintain a detailed itinerary including in-park stops.
- Maintain this information after the trip to facilitate the need for any post tour outreach.

- Develop procedures for and immediately upon becoming aware, report any known or suspected COVID-19 illness to the park point of contact (e.g., concession specialist or commercial use authorization (CUA) manager, park manger, park public health consultant) and the local health authorities. Please refer to the NPS Action Steps for Managing and Reporting COVID-19 Cases Among Commercial Service Providers, Contractors, and Partners.

Training, Communications and Management

Due to significant operational changes to prevent COVID-19 that might be present on a tour, multi-day road-based tour training, communications and management are critical. Multi-day road-based tour operators should:

- Establish and implement training programs for drivers and tour guides on the road-based tour on COVID-19 management plan and practices.
- Provide clear guidance to customers in advance on the potential risks of road-based tour travel, and public health practices that will be required during the tour through web sites, reservation systems email, confirmation materials and other pre-trip correspondence.
- Provide initial briefing and daily reminders to passengers of public health practices to be followed including wearing masks, physical distancing, and hygiene. Address specific park and other venue requirements.
- Provide signage on the vehicle in multiple languages with illustrations outlining public health practices to be followed.
- Use a check list or other management controls to track compliance with all in-trip critical prevention measures.

Developing a COVID-19 Management Plan

The NPS is actively fostering the President’s plan to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic while providing access to visitors including those coming on multi-day road-based tours. Operators should develop a COVID-19 management plan that applies appropriate COVID-19 management practices including, at minimum, those necessary to meet all applicable requirements including any applicable state and local requirements and any adopted by the park through administrative orders. Additionally, operators since operators must comply with local and state requirements in the jurisdictions they are traveling through they need to contact these health jurisdictions to understand physical distancing and occupancy limits, emergency medical resources and other applicable specific jurisdiction operating procedures and build those needs into their plan. Finally, operators are encouraged to implement additional COVID-19 prevention measures which may include those outlined in this guidance. The more robust the plan the operator has, the lower risk they will represent to their customers, employees, and the parks they visit.

The majority of park units do not require a CUA or other authorization for commercial tour operators to enter the park. There is currently a moratorium on parks setting up a road-based tour CUA program if one was not already in place. Those parks that do not have a CUA program should clearly post the requirements for multi-day road-based tours on their website to ensure the information is available to bus operators in advance. Operators are reminded that requirements related to preventing pandemic spread may change at any time and may occur with little to no notice. Operators should visit the park website and review the requirements that are applicable to multi-day road-based tours before they reach the park gate.

In parks that have a road-based tour CUA program, multi-day tour companies may be required to provide their COVID-19 management plan during the application process or at any time upon request during the term of the commercial use authorization. Operators should contact the park’s point of contact identified on the park’s

website with any questions. Operators should also contact concession facilities they may be stopping at to understand any limitations they might have as well as those in gateway communities.

Resources

Source	Title and Hyperlink
NPS	Public Health Information for the Partner Community
CDC	Requirement for Face Masks on Public Transportation Conveyances Disinfecting Your Non-Emergency Vehicle Guidance Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility Travel During COVID Protect Yourself when Using Transportation Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes What To Do If You Are Sick COVID-19 Symptoms and Screening Use Masks to Slow the Spread of COVID-19 Communications Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People
Industry Groups	World Travel and Tourism Council: Safe Travel's Protocols -- Tour Operators American Bus Association: Motorcoach Cleanliness and Safety Protocols United States Tour Operators Association: TOURCARE Guidelines for Tour Operators