CDC Requires Face Masks on Public Transportation and at Transportation Hubs

The order requires masks while traveling on airplanes, trains, subways and buses or using ride-share services like Uber.

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Traveling on public transportation increases a person's risk of getting and spreading COVID-19 by bringing people in close contact with others, often for prolonged periods, and exposing them to frequently touched surfaces. Air travel often requires spending time in security lines and busy airport terminals. Travel by bus, train, and other conveyances used for international, interstate, or intrastate transportation poses similar challenges.

Staying 6 feet away from others is often difficult on public transportation. People may not be able to distance themselves by the recommended at least 6 feet from other people seated nearby or from those standing in or passing through the aisles on airplanes, trains, or buses.

Travel has led—and continues to lead to—interstate and international spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. Wearing masks that completely cover the mouth and nose reduce the spread of COVID-19. People who never develop symptoms (asymptomatic) or are not yet showing symptoms (pre-symptomatic) might not know that they are infected but can still spread COVID-19 to others. Masks also offer protection to the wearer.

CDC has issued an order that requires face masks to be worn by all travelers while on public transportation (which includes all passengers and all personnel operating conveyances). People must wear masks that completely cover both the mouth and nose while awaiting, boarding, disembarking, or traveling on airplanes, ships, ferries, trains, subways, buses, taxis, and ride-shares as they are traveling into, within, or out of the United States and U.S. territories. People must also wear masks while at transportation hubs (e.g., airports, bus or ferry terminals, train and subway stations, seaports) and other locations where people board public transportation in the United States and U.S. territories.

Public transportation operators must use best efforts to ensure that any person on the conveyance wears a mask when boarding, disembarking, and for the duration of travel. Depending on the circumstances, public transportation operators must take the following actions:

- board only people who wear masks;
- instruct people that wearing a mask on the conveyance is a requirement of federal law and that not complying with the requirement is a violation of federal law;
- monitor the conveyance for any person who is not wearing a mask and seek compliance from such a person;
- at the earliest safe opportunity, disembark any person who refuses to comply; and
- notify people of the requirement to make sure they aware of and comply with the requirement to wear a mask. Examples of such notifications are messaging in apps, on websites or through email; posters in multiple languages with illustrations; and printing the information on tickets.

People are not required to wear a mask under the following circumstances:

- while eating, drinking, or taking medication for brief periods of time;
- while communicating, for brief periods of time, with a person who is hearing impaired when the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication;
- if, on an aircraft, wearing of oxygen masks is needed because of loss of cabin pressure or other event affecting aircraft ventilation;
- if unconscious (for reasons other than sleeping), incapacitated, unable to be awakened, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance; or
- when necessary to temporarily remove the mask to verify one's identity such as during Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screening or when asked to do so by the ticket or gate agent or any law enforcement official.

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

- A child under the age of 2 years;
- A person with a disability who cannot wear a mask, or cannot safely wear a mask, for reasons related to the disability;
- 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.

People on board the following categories of conveyances are exempt from the requirement to

wear a mask:

- Private conveyances operated only for personal, non-commercial use;
- Commercial motor vehicles or trucks, if the driver is the only person in the vehicle or truck;
- Conveyances operated by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) as long as the operator of the conveyance follows all DOD requirements to prevent spread of COVID-19.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a public transportation conveyance?
A public transportation conveyance is any mode of transportation other than a private vehicle. Types of public transportation conveyances include airplanes, trains, subways, buses, taxis, ride-shares, ferries, ships, trolleys, and cable cars.

Which public transportation conveyances does the order apply to?
The order applies to all public transportation conveyances traveling into the United States (i.e., arriving from a foreign country) or within the United States (including within states or territories or traveling between states or territories). It also applies to all conveyances leaving the United States until they arrive at a foreign destination.

What kind of mask should I wear?
People should wear masks that completely cover the mouth and nose and fits snugly against the sides of the face. See CDC's guidance for attributes of masks needed to fulfill the requirements of the order.

What is a transportation hub?
A transportation hub is any location where people gather to await, board, or disembark public transportation. This include airports, bus and ferry terminals, marinas, train and subway stations, seaports, and ride-share pick-up locations.

Which transportation hubs does the order apply to?
The order applies to all transportation hubs in the United States and U.S. territories, except those operated by the U.S. Department of Defense.

Who is an operator of a public transportation conveyance?
A public transportation conveyance operator is any individual or organization causing or authorizing the operation of a conveyance and includes the transportation company, as well as crew, drivers, conductors, ticket takers, and other workers involved in the operation of the conveyance.

What happens if I don't wear a mask on a public transportation conveyance?
Operators of public transportation conveyances must refuse to board anyone not wearing a mask that completely covers the mouth and nose and require that everyone on board wears a mask for the entire duration of travel. If a passenger refuses to comply, the operator must disembark the

person at the earliest safe opportunity.

What happens if I don’t wear a mask in a transportation hub?
Operators of public transportation conveyances must deny entry to anyone not wearing a mask that completely covers the mouth and nose and require that everyone on the premises wears a mask. If a person refuses to comply, the operator must remove the person from the premises at the earliest safe opportunity.

What if I need to take my mask off during travel or in a transportation hub?
There are some circumstances when taking your mask off would be necessary, including brief periods of time while eating, drinking, or taking medication. Other reasons include medical emergencies, to verify identity during security screenings, or if asked to do so by ticket/gate agents or law enforcement. On a plane, masks should be removed if oxygen masks are needed because of loss of cabin pressure. If individuals touch their mask while removing or wearing it back, wash hands with water and soap for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer.

Do I need to wear a mask if I have recovered from COVID-19?
Yes, the order requires all travelers to wear a mask, including those who have recovered from COVID-19.

Do I need to wear a mask if I have had a COVID-19 vaccine?
Yes, the order requires all travelers to wear a mask, including those who have been vaccinated against COVID-19.

What if another person near me refuses to wear a mask?
If you are on a conveyance and a passenger near you refuses to wear a mask, alert personnel working on the conveyance (e.g., crew member, driver, conductor) for assistance. If you are in a transportation hub, notify a staff member or security personnel.

Why is CDC making this a requirement now?
Scientific evidence shows that consistent and universal use of masks on public transportation systems and in transportation hubs will protect Americans and help to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Mask use will enable Americans to travel responsibly and as safely as possible when they need to travel during the pandemic.

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