

Protocol regarding the health guidelines for the collective transport of people by bus or coach for national or international travel

Thus far the various recommendations from expert groups have provided insufficient clarity regarding the reopening of transport routes for passengers in buses or coaches, outside of the scope of the public contracts for public transport and the transportation of pupils in special education. The usual clients for these routes include schools, companies, social or cultural associations, sports or other event organisations, tour operators, day-trip organisers etc.

The Federation of Belgian Bus and Coach Operators, in collaboration with social partners, provides the following recommendations to facilitate the reopening of the collective transport of people as part of the exit strategy.

The rules below are therefore based on an agreement within the sector and take into account certain legal obligations. They also take into account the European Commission COVID-19 guidelines of 13 May on the progressive-resumption of transport services and connectivity.

Applicability

These rules are subject to change if the National Security Council takes new decisions in light of further developments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The activities in question are permitted for transport companies on the condition that the following measures are observed on Belgian territory.

1. General

For private companies in the sector, safeguarding the health of passengers and employees is of the highest priority. This type of passenger transport involves the transportation of closed groups, and the sector has a wealth of knowledge and experience with a specific type of clientele. This gives transport companies an unusual advantage in implementing the appropriate measures in a structured and efficient manner. It therefore means that the risk of spreading the virus can be significantly reduced.

In addition, in the event of infection, reporting can occur quickly and accurately by forwarding the personal details of the co-passengers to the relevant authorities, in compliance with applicable legislation.

These proposed measures apply in and around the vehicle and at entrance and exit doors. These guidelines do not apply to other areas within the transport company, such as the office or the reception, or in the workplace. In addition, these guidelines do not apply to the end destination or any stops. At these locations, the general COVID-19 guidelines apply, as set out in the General Guide V2 (Generieke Gids V2). If the coach or bus is making a quick stop at a car park, the driver is responsible for ensuring that the general rules are followed.

The health guidelines in the country of departure and arrival must be respected by the transport companies in all of the respective territories.

2. Preparation

- The vehicle must be sufficiently ventilated before every journey and also during stops.
- In the driver's cabin, all touch points and zones must be cleaned and disinfected in accordance with the guidelines.
- Any hard or smooth surfaces inside the vehicle that passengers may come into contact with must be disinfected. This includes handles, arm and head rests, control panels, etc. They should also be disinfected during the planned stops.
- The first row of seats should be kept empty and the safety zone between the driver's cabin and the passenger area must be indicated with a physical barrier, such as a (breakable) safety chain. If the first row of seats behind the driver's cabin are used, a shield made of a flexible material must be installed, while taking into account visibility and safety aspects.
- If a passenger is infected, the vehicle must undergo a full and thorough disinfection.
- The ventilation system must be maintained in accordance with the guidelines from the manufacturer and must be configured and used in a way that ensures that the maximum volume of fresh air is brought in from outside.
- A stock of hand sanitiser and disposable gloves must be provided for use during the safety procedures.
- The vehicle must be parked in a location that allows sufficient free space for people to safely move around during the loading and unloading of luggage and when entering and exiting the vehicle.
- Passengers that belong to social bubbles should be kept together; for other passengers, we recommend keeping different age categories apart.
- If applicable, a seating plan can be drawn up in advance in consultation with the organiser or group representative.
- The passengers should be given a practical briefing, if possible, in advance (e.g. by email), regarding the measures that must be taken, and this should preferably be given by the group leader. If this is not possible due to the weather or other circumstances, a handout can be provided.
- The passenger details, including contact details, must be kept for a period of four weeks, in compliance with the national regulations on data protection. In accordance with legislation, it must be possible to provide this information for contact tracing.

3. Entering and exiting procedure:

- If a passenger shows signs of illness before the departure, the driver, along with the company management, must inform the healthcare services and avoid all contact with other persons. The departure should be postponed until the potential risk has been properly managed.
- For vehicles with two doors, only the back door should be used by passengers.
- Before entering the vehicle, passengers should be asked to keep a safe distance.

- Any document checks, including tickets, should be carried out without personal contact insofar as this is possible.
- If the passengers are boarding at the transport company, we recommend installing signs.
- Passengers should be divided into two groups the L(ef)t group, which will be seated at the back, and the R(igh)t group, which will be seated at the front.
- If a seating plan is created in advance, the boarding sequence should be adapted to this plan.
- The passengers will enter and exit the vehicle according to the FILO principle.
- Passengers must follow the general COVID-19 safety measures and disinfect their hands every time they enter the vehicle.
- The driver(s) should be the first out and last in.

4. Luggage procedure

- As little hand luggage as possible should be taken onto the vehicle.
- A safe perimeter should be maintained in front of the vehicle's luggage compartment and should ideally be designated with signs, if possible.
- The driver will handle the loading and unloading of the luggage and will wear mandatory disposable gloves.
- Passengers should bring their luggage within reach of the driver in an orderly fashion, without approaching the driver, and will receive their luggage back at the boundary of the safety zone.

5. During the journey

- Masks are mandatory for passengers (aged 12 and above) for the entire duration of the journey if a safe distance of 1.5 m between passengers cannot be maintained.
- Passengers should remain in their seats for the entirety of the journey, including during the return journey. Signs should be used or installed to help passengers remember which is their seat.
- The on-board toilet will not be in use and sufficient stops at locations with sanitary facilities should be planned for longer journeys.
- The on-board refrigerator will not be used for distributing drinks or snacks to passengers.
- During these stops, the vehicle should be ventilated again.
- Since a sufficient distance can be kept, double manning with respect to driving and rest periods is permitted in the driver's cabin. When changing driver, the cabin as well as the passenger seat must be disinfected.
- If the driver's cabin is protected from the passenger zone with a flexible shield, the driver does not need to wear a mask.
- During journeys without passengers, the driver or mechanic is not obligated to wear a mask.
- Process for handling suspected COVID-19 cases:
 - Isolate the passenger in question – all contact with other persons should be avoided.
 - Contact the transport company and the federal or local police who will coordinate the steps to be taken with the driver, the group leader, and the company.