



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

March 24, 2021

Purpose

This guidance is intended to inform those that oversee or operate multi-day road-based tours in national parks of COVID-19 related public health requirement 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 a non-profit activity. 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 through parks.

The information contained in this document is provided as a resource for parks and visitor service providers to assist them in operating in units of the National Park Service. 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 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 issued EO #13998: [Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel](#). The CDC issued an order implementing aspects of EO #13998 titled "[Requirement for Persons to Wear Masks While on Conveyances and at Transportation Hubs](#)." Multi-day Road-based tour operators must follow the requirements as outlined in these authorities when operating in national parks as well as all other applicable federal requirements.

In addition to requirements concerning practices on-the-vehicle, multi-day road-based tour operators and passengers must comply with any applicable requirements when they are in parks and 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 providers when they enter a park unit unless the park superintendent has adopted and implemented more stringent requirements based on application of the NPS's Risk Assessment Tool. All such more-stringent park-specific 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, operators may implement their own requirements based upon industry standards or company policy that exceed these requirements and guidelines.

Multi-day Road-based tour COVID-19 Management Practices

The following outlines COVID-19-related management practices applicable to multi-day road-based tours during the time they are operating in NPS-administered park areas. It identifies those that are federal requirements, [CDC guidelines for travel during COVID-19](#) and other practices to prevent COVID-19. States and localities may have additional requirements. Transportation system operators may also consult the guidelines prepared by transportation and tour industry organizations.

According to the NPS Office of Public Health, multi-day road-based tours have characteristics that could present particular COVID-19 risks for parks. 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 may have higher potential to acquire illness and spread it among themselves than in other types of commercial visitor services. Conversely, since they travel as a cohesive group there are mitigations that could be applied that would not be available for other services such as screening and testing, that could potentially help mitigate some of these risks.

Face Masks

[EO #13998](#) and the supplemental [CDC order](#) requires face masks to be worn by all travelers while on conveyances which includes passengers, guides and personnel operating multi-day road-based tour vehicles. People must wear masks that completely cover both the mouth and nose while awaiting, boarding, disembarking, or traveling. Furthermore, in accordance with federal requirements outlined in Executive Order No. 13991: [Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing](#), masks must be worn in federal buildings and on federal lands when physical distancing can't be maintained. This requirement applies to individuals on multi-day road-based tours when they are in the park and step off the tour vehicle (see [Mask-Wearing for NPS Commercial Visitor Service Providers and Partners](#)).

Multi-day road-based tour operators must use best efforts to ensure that all passengers wear a mask to meet the CDC order. These road-based 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.

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. More information on mask requirements and visitors with disabilities is under development and will be shared when it becomes available.

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. Additionally, adopting a policy for passengers to wear masks when off the vehicle in jurisdictions that may not have a mask requirement is a COVID-19 preventive measure that may be adopted by a multi-day road-based tour operator to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

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 maintaining a distance of at least six feet (about two arms' length) from other people, where possible. Tour operators are encouraged to employ this CDC guidance as a COVID-19 prevention measure. They may do this by limiting the number of passengers per vehicle and providing empty rows and seats between families and individual passengers traveling together.

Given the length of trip and the potential for interaction between individuals on the vehicle while touring together, some tour operators may determine that the practice of physical distancing on the vehicle might not be practical. They may determine to use other COVID-19 prevention measures to help protect passengers and help provide assurance to parks on the health of their passengers such as providing enhanced vehicle ventilation systems, screening, testing and/or vaccination.

Multi-day road-based tours can often present a challenge because they may carry a larger number of people who, when discharging at a location, can contribute to congestion and difficulty in maintaining the CDC-recommended six-foot physical distancing. The NPS is developing occupancy standards that will apply to tour passengers when they step off the vehicle. Additionally, multi-day road-based commercial tour operators should consider the following COVID-19 prevention measures:

- Avoiding crowded park locations and times of day;

- Skipping stops that already appear too congested;
- Asking tour passengers to discharge in smaller groups to assist the park in meeting its physical distancing goal;
- Asking passengers to use onboard vehicle restrooms rather than park restrooms (which can often be congestion points);
- Staying in a group when off the bus and seeking to stay distanced from other visitors. This may include arranging in advance with in-park services such as restaurants and lodging to avoid congestion and to keep the multi-day road-based tour group together.

Note that, some states and localities may have standards such as those for vehicle occupancy and group size which may be applicable or adopted by the park through an administrative order. Additionally, when determined necessary to protect public health, the park superintendent may administratively order other actions intended to reduce congestion and maintain physical distancing such as limiting the number of buses that can enter the park and when and where they can stop.

Vehicle Modifications

There are no federal requirements, but multi-day road-based tour companies should consider vehicle modifications/improvements as COVID-19 prevention measures such as the following:

- Improve conveyance ventilation systems.
- Install a clear, protective barrier (e.g. plexiglass) between the vehicle operator and the passengers.
- Provide “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 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:

- Require passengers to quarantine before the trip.
- Require passengers to obtain a negative viral test one to three days before the trip per CDC [guidelines for travel during COVID-19](#) require the driver, tour guide and passengers obtain a negative COVID-19 test shortly before the tour.
- Require the driver, tour guide and passengers to self-screen for symptoms daily.

- Conduct 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.
- Schedule trips with driver, tour guide and passengers that have been vaccinated.

Reporting and Contact Tracing and Investigation

The park's ability to quickly track known and suspected COVID-19 cases is critical to maintaining the health of NPS employees, partner personnel and 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 manager, park public health consultant) and the local health authorities.

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 |
| 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 |