

## Taking public transit safely

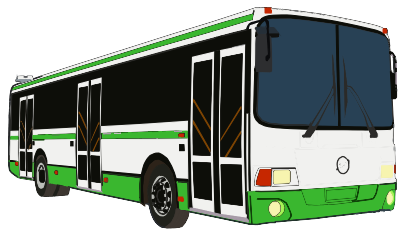


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Public transit is an important form of travel, including getting to work during the COVID-19 pandemic (1). Even though there are concerns around public transit because of crowding in a closed environment, as well as high-touch surfaces (2,3,4,5), more and more people are slowly returning to public transit (6). While one study on a long-distance high-speed train suggests that there is a risk of virus transmission to the nearest co-riders, and to those who co-ride the longest (7), it's heartening that there have been strikingly few reported infection clusters on public transit, even in communities with high ridership (5,8,9). Another interesting argument is that the transmission risk may not be as high as we think on routes with frequent stops, since the regular opening of doors may promote air exchange (8), which decreases the risk of infection (2,3).

As with any activity during COVID, public transit brings risk of virus transmission, but that risk can be limited. Key strategies to limiting COVID transmission on public transit are:

1. creating distance between you and others, as best you can (7,10,11) – if you can, ride during non-peak hours to avoid crowds (10);
2. wearing masks by everyone on public transit, to limit the release of respiratory droplets (5,7,10,11); and
3. using good hygiene practices, like sanitizing before and after riding, covering a cough or sneeze with the crook of an elbow, and avoiding touching your face with non-sanitized hands (5,10,11).

**If you rely on public transit, use this how-to to confidently and effectively do so.**

### Toolkit for taking Public Transit

- pocket hand sanitizer
- a mask, stored in a clean sealable bag until mask use
- a breathable bag to store a used mask

**Note:** if you are experiencing COVID-like symptoms, Don't Go Out! Stay home, and arrange to be tested. (2,3)

1. Before boarding a bus or entering a station, put on your mask.
  - 1) Sanitize your hands. 2) Put on your mask. 3) If you've just put on a used mask, sanitize your hands again; if the mask was clean, it's not necessary.
  - You have the option to put on your mask outdoors at the bus stop or station, or you might do it at home.\*
2. As you pass through the station, or board the bus or train, use only one hand to touch all public surfaces, if you don't need two hands to complete an action safely.
  - Better yet, if there are hands-free options (e.g. motion sensor door openers) avoid touching surfaces. (9,10)
3. Find a spot – a seat or a standing space – as distanced from others as you can; members of a household or cohort can stay close.
4. Once you have found your spot, sanitize your hands.
  - Retrieve your sanitizer with your clean hand (that is with the hand you didn't use to touch public surfaces); it helps to have the sanitizer stored in a place that you can access with one hand.
  - Avoid touching your belongings or your face, especially with your 'public surface' hand, until you have sanitized.
  - If you have to touch surfaces for stability (e.g. when standing, or on the edge of a seat), again designate a 'public surface' hand to hold-on, and avoid using it to touch your face or your belongings.
5. As you leave the bus or train, and maybe pass through a station, again, use only one hand to touch all public surfaces, if you don't need two hands to complete an action safely.



Wear a mask on public transit, even if it's not mandated where you live.



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6. Once you have exited the bus, or the train and the station, sanitize your hands.
7. If masks are not required at your destination, you may choose to remove your mask; alternatively, or you may choose to wait until you are in an indoor space where masks are not required.\*\*
  - 1) sanitize your hands (unless you just completed step 6 – no need to repeat). 2) Take off your mask, and store it in a breathable bag. 3) Sanitize your hands again.

Sanitize your hands before and after riding public transit; also sanitize after you have boarded and have settled in your spot.

**\*You may choose to put on your mask outdoors at the bus stop or station, or do it before you leave home.** For example, over the summer I put on my mask when I arrived at my bus stop – first sanitizing my hands, then putting on a clean mask. Recently, overnight temperatures have dropped to single digits in Edmonton, and I have found that in the morning it feels awfully chilly to sanitize my hands outdoors; in this case, I prefer to put on my mask before I leave my home – not only do I protect my hands from a chilling hand-sanitizing experience, but the mask also protects my face against chilly weather, which will only get chillier as winter approaches.

**\*\*You may take off your mask after exiting the bus or the train station, or wait until you arrive at your destination.** Do what makes sense. For example, on my way to work I do not remove my mask when I exit public transit, but leave it on until I am in my office a few minutes later, since I require a mask as I pass through the common areas of my work environment.

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