

SAFER

Safe Actions For Employee Returns

Transportation Customer Service Recommendations



Introduction:

Transportation workers, including transit operators and bus drivers, regularly interact with the public during the COVID-19 pandemic. Safety measures are in place to help protect them as well as passengers from being exposed to and contracting COVID-19. Unfortunately, these essential workers are often faced with challenging interactions when individuals refuse to abide by safety guidelines, putting everyone at risk. This document offers recommendations and guidelines on how to prevent and mitigate such interactions and how to make sure each incident is accurately reported and addressed.

Safety Guidelines

Many public transportation systems have adopted strong safety measures during COVID-19. These measures may require use of face coverings by passengers and operators, encouraging physical distancing, regularly scheduled cleaning and disinfection and physical barriers for bus and rail operators.¹ These measures not only protect the essential workers of public transportation, but also protect riders of public transportation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also has published recommendations for those using transportation.²

Recommendations

The following recommendations are meant to help public transportation employees prevent and work through potential adverse interactions with the public as employees implement safety guidelines and suggested practices. These recommendations may also be useful for other public-facing industries, such as the retail and hospitality industries. Creating safe places to work and travel is essential to navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Preventing an Incident

- Provide clear communication and signage regarding the safety guidelines employed. Post safety guidelines on your website, so passengers know about them before they arrive at the transit location. Signage should be in multiple languages, utilize imaging and other graphics, and be repeated in regular announcements.
- Provide clear and frequent communications to all staff on the safety guidelines in place, including language about how to communicate these guidelines and why they are needed.
- Provide staff with training and information on the warning signs for violence, mitigating conflict and defusing tension. Make it clear the role of staff within the system to enforce safety guidelines.
- Provide staff with tips and training on communicating guidelines and messages. These include things such as:
 - Think before you speak.
 - Be clear and concise.
 - Speak with confidence.
 - Vary your vocal tone.
 - Be a good listener.
 - Be aware of non-verbal communication cues.
 - Consider the perspectives of the other person.
- Outline steps for staff to defuse situations, call for assistance and any right to refuse services to individuals who will not comply with stated safety guidelines.
- Ensure employees have a reliable form of communication to reach someone for help at all locations.
- Conduct media awareness campaigns to educate the public on the safety guidelines, their purpose and request compliance.

¹ <https://www.apta.com/public-transit-response-to-coronavirus/apta-resources/>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/using-transportation.html>

During an Incident

- Employees should take care to try to defuse or deescalate the situation by communicating the stated safety guidelines and ask they be followed.
- Employees should take care to not involve or engage other passengers or members of the public during the incident.
- Employees should take any necessary steps to ensure their own safety and the safety of other passengers and members of the public including withdrawing or seeking additional assistance if there is an escalation during the confrontation.
- Employees should feel confident in employing the steps outlined by their employer for use in addressing the situation. These might include:
 - Clearly communicating the safety guidelines in place.
 - Calling for assistance from other staff.
 - Refusing service to those unwilling to comply with local safety guidelines.
 - Avoiding physical contact or threatening body language.
- Employees should feel comfortable employing the LAST technique: Listen, Apologize, Solve the problem and Thank.

Reporting an Incident

- Implement a reporting structure for staff who experience adverse interactions with the public and have an action plan in place to respond to each report.
- Create a post-incident action plan with clear steps for staff reporting and documenting incidents.
- Establish a database to track incidents and assess whether adjustments to messaging, signage or practices are necessary to prevent future incidents.
- Clearly communicate with staff the actions that come from their reporting and provide communication on how the incident was handled.
- Share lessons from incidents with other staff, as appropriate, while maintaining the privacy of the individual employee.