

Interim Guidance for Hurricane Evacuation Transport to General Population Shelters during the COVID-19 Pandemic

This interim guidance is based on current information about the transmission and severity of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) will update this guidance as needed and as additional information becomes available. Please check the [DSHS COVID-19 website](#) periodically for updated guidance.

Target Audience

This document is intended for use by emergency management and other partners involved in hurricane evacuation transport of people in Texas coastal areas.

Purpose

This document provides interim guidance to reduce the risk of introducing and transmitting COVID-19 during the transport of people from an embarkation hub to a general population shelter during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key points

- Public health measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as social distancing and the use of face masks or cloth face coverings, should be implemented before, during, and after transport to general population shelters.
- Evacuation plans may need to be modified to account for limited travel options and increased time needed in a COVID-19 environment.

Transportation

The following prevention methods should be implemented during the transport of people from an embarkation hub to a general population shelter:

- Institute measures to physically separate or create distance of at least 6 feet between all occupants to the extent possible. Family units or groups (i.e. provider accompanying patient) can remain together but should be separated from others by at least 6 feet. This may include:
 - Asking bus passengers to enter and exit the bus through rear doors, while allowing exceptions for persons with disabilities.
 - Closing every other row of seats on a bus or plane.
 - Reducing maximum occupancy of vehicles as appropriate.
 - Providing physical guides to ensure that individuals or groups remain at least 6 feet apart while on vehicles. For example, floor decals,



- colored tape, or signs to indicate where passengers should not sit or stand can be used to guide passengers.
- Installing physical barriers, such as sneeze guards and partitions, on vehicles to the extent practicable.
 - If there is a need to enter via the front, escort passengers into the vehicle and have them fill the seats from back to front to prevent people from passing by others not in their group.
 - Improve the ventilation in the vehicle if possible. For example, open the windows or set the air ventilation/air conditioning on non-recirculation mode.
 - Provide cloth face coverings to individuals if available.
 - Note: [Cloth face coverings](#) should **not** be placed on:
 - Babies and children younger than 2 years old
 - Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious
 - Anyone who is incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the cloth face covering without assistance
 - Cloth face coverings are meant to protect other people in case the wearer is unknowingly infected but does not have symptoms.
 - Encourage individuals to practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette before, during, and after transport by:
 - [Washing hands](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol before leaving and after reaching their destination.
 - Avoiding frequently touched surfaces.
 - Not touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or using the inside of their elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and wash hands immediately with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
 - Ensure that trash bins are placed on vehicle and at departure and arrival locations.
 - Consider providing hygiene kits to all those at the embarkation hub who will need transport to shelters. These kits may include hand sanitizer, tissues, and sanitizing wipes or alcohol wipes. Include educational materials about COVID-19 prevention using DSHS or CDC flyers or infographics.
 - Plan on the utilization of separate vehicles to transport sick and well individuals. Those who are sick should not be transported in the same vehicle as those who are well.

If a person requires immediate medical attention, call emergency services for transport to the nearest healthcare facility for evaluation.

After transport and before the vehicle is used again, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces. To disinfect, use products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2, diluted household bleach solutions, or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and are appropriate for the surface. Provide employees training on manufacturer's directions for use.

Arrival at General Population Shelter

- Medical screening of all people entering a general population shelter should be conducted. Although people may have undergone medical screening at different points during the evacuation process, individuals may become ill or decompensate from an underlying medical condition during transport. Utilize the screening process in the [DSHS Interim Guidance for General Population Disaster Shelters during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) for all individuals entering a general population shelter.