

Best Practices for Accessible Travel in the Context of COVID-19

Shelley Kelsey, Caidence Paleske,
Chantal Trudel & Alexia Ziccardi

Date: February 1, 2021



Table of contents

- 1. Background and Why This Work is Needed 3
- 2. Statement of Transparency 4
- 3. COVID-19 Best Practices 5
 - 3.1 Physical Distancing and Navigation 5
 - 3.2 Non-medical Masks or Face Coverings 7
 - 3.3 Hand Washing and Sanitization 10
 - 3.4 Communicating Information..... 11
- 4. Travel Tips for Persons with Disabilities During COVID-19 13

National Research Council Canada
Flight Research Laboratory

Best Practices for Accessible Travel in the Context of COVID-19

Report No.: LM-FRL-2021-0019
Date: February 16, 2021
Authors: Shelley Kelsey, Caidence Paleske, and Alexia Ziccardi

Classification: Unclassified Distribution: Unlimited

For:

SIGMA ID#: A1-018405

Submitted by: Shelley Kelsey

Approved by: Kirk Shaw

Pages : 11 Copy No : 0

Fig. : 0 Diagrams : 0

This report may not be published wholly or in part without the written consent of the National Research Council of Canada Aerospace Portfolio.

1. Background and Why This Work is Needed

The COVID-19 pandemic has created several challenges in transportation services for Canadians, and in particular, Canadians with disabilities.

Disability is defined as “any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment – or a functional limitation – whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society.” *Accessible Canada Act.*

While many transportation services have resumed or continued operations, the rapid introduction of new rules to reduce the spread of COVID-19 has unintentionally introduced new barriers for some travellers with disabilities.

Barrier is defined as “anything – including anything physical, architectural, technological or attitudinal, anything that is based on information or communications or anything that is the result of a policy or a practice – that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment or a functional limitation.” *Accessible Canada Act.*

Understandably, persons with disabilities have raised concerns about their needs being met, and transportation providers are also questioning how they might better serve travellers with disabilities during the pandemic.

This guidance has been prepared by the National Research Council of Canada - Centre for Air Travel Research (NRC - CATR), with the support of the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) and Transport Canada (TC). It is designed to provide best practices to transportation service providers in the following areas related to COVID-19 conditions:

- physical distancing and navigation;
- non-medical mask or face covering;

- sanitization and hand washing, and
- communicating information.

The last section provides travel tips for persons with disabilities during COVID-19.

2. Statement of Transparency

This is not a legal document. The information provided is for general guidance only. The obligations of transportation service providers, including those relating to personnel training, communication, and services can be found in the Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations (ATDPR). Where differences may arise between this guide and the ATDPR, or other relevant legislation or regulations, the legislation and regulations prevail.

The preliminary guidance provided is meant to be inclusive of all dimensions of disabilities. Although a wide range of advocacy groups and people with disabilities were included to collect lived experiences regarding travel during COVID-19, we recognize that this work can never be complete in capturing the diverse range of people's experiences.

The information used to form the guidance provided in this document was collected through:

- publicly available information such as websites, media outlets, and blogs;
- scientific, peer-reviewed journal articles;
- organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Air Transport Association (IATA);
- interviews with federally regulated transportation service providers;
- disability advocacy groups; and
- interviews with people with disabilities.

3. COVID-19 Best Practices

Although non-essential travel may not be recommended during different periods of time, the following best practices are recommended when travel is unavoidable or when it is safe to travel. Best practices and recommendations for transportation service providers are set out in this section across four categories to enhance the accessibility of physical distancing protocols; non-medical masks or face coverings; hand washing and sanitization; and communicating information.

3.1 Physical Distancing and Navigation

Physical distancing in public spaces helps to limit the spread of COVID-19. Physical distancing protocols are typically communicated using visual floor decals, stickers, tape or paint on floors or sidewalks. In addition, transparent barriers (sneeze-guards), stanchions, and rope barriers are often being used to encourage physical distancing and manage the flow of people in public spaces. But all of these strategies rely on vision, comprehension, and limiting or regulating movement to support physical distancing protocols. This can make navigating public spaces during COVID-19 especially challenging for people who live with visual, intellectual, or physical disabilities. Physical distancing may also pose challenges for individuals who rely on the close proximity of staff who provide services such as physical help navigating environments or wheelchair transfers. The following best practices highlight recommendations regarding physical distancing protocols.

Best practices for transportation service providers:

- Provide staff with single-use disposable protective jackets or other personal protective coverings to allow travellers who require guiding assistance to safely touch their elbow or shoulder. Staff should communicate to travellers prior to physically assisting them that they have put on this sterile covering to keep them safe, taking into account any disability-related communication needs and preferences. Similar protocols should be in place for staff when providing assistance to a traveller with operating an automated self-service kiosk.

- Place high contrast borders around the small openings and perimeters of transparent barriers so travellers can better detect these surfaces and know where they should speak or pass items through.
- When providing transparent barriers at check-in desks, make sure that staff can still maintain space for people using mobility aids and allow for face-to-face interaction.
- If a physical search is required as part of the security screening process, ensure that this process is described to the traveller and that extra precautions are taken to ensure everyone's safety when staff are within 2 metres of the traveller (e.g., using gloves, replacing swabs, wearing face shields).
- Try to avoid the use of stanchions and rope barriers as they could present challenges for travellers who are blind or partially sighted, as well as guide dogs who have a lower field of view and could miss detecting them.
- Have single-use, personal protective equipment (PPE) available (e.g., gowns, gloves, non-medical mask or face coverings, face shields, etc.) for staff that perform traveller lifts and transfers. Explain, and ideally demonstrate, the additional safety processes to the traveller prior to physical interaction. PPE should be changed and safely disposed of immediately after the transfer is complete, once no other physical assistance to support the traveller is required, and before any other physical interaction between staff or other travellers.
- Have sanitized canes available to help guide people who are blind or partially sighted and reassure them that they have been sanitized. All canes should be immediately sanitized after each use and placed in an area or container that indicates they have been sanitized. If the container is not in a controlled area, the canes should be sanitized prior to their next use. Staff should inform travellers of this process.
- Install transparent barriers in assistance vehicles to enable physical distance between driver and travellers.

- Consider the use of a multi-sensory or quiet room for travellers where they can safely go if they need time to themselves prior to starting their trip.
- Have clear and concise instructions for those travelling with a support person regarding seating proximity throughout the journey.
- If there are restrictions placed on people without tickets from entering buildings, consider allowing companions and family members who are providing assistance to travellers with disabilities to accompany them within the general public areas (e.g., check-in counter, baggage claim).

3.2 Non-medical Masks or Face Coverings

The use of non-medical masks or face coverings that cover the nose, mouth, and chin is currently required by Transport Canada as a strategy for minimizing the spread of COVID-19; all air travellers, with few exceptions, are required to wear a non-medical mask or face covering while travelling. In all other modes, operators may require travellers to wear a non-medical mask or face covering whenever possible, especially when interacting with others, and when they cannot maintain a distance of 2 metres. As stated in Transport Canada's Interim Order Respecting Certain Requirements for Civil Aviation Due to COVID-19, No. 18, as amended from time to time, the following persons are not required to wear a non-medical mask or face covering:

- a child who is less than two years of age;
- a child who is at least two years of age, but less than six years of age who is unable to tolerate wearing a non-medical mask or face covering;
- a person who provides a medical certificate certifying that they are unable to wear a non-medical mask or face covering for a medical reason;
- a person who is unconscious;
- a person who is unable to remove their non-medical mask or face covering without assistance;

- a crew member; and
- a gate agent.

Wearing a non-medical mask or face covering can present challenges for some people with different types of disabilities. People who are deaf or hard of hearing may rely on lip reading and facial expressions to communicate, so blocking half the face removes a crucial source of information. Some travellers may also find wearing a non-medical mask or face covering confusing or distressing, for reasons related to the nature of their disability. The following best practices are recommended to enhance the accessibility of mandatory non-medical masks or face coverings during travel. They have been categorized to accommodate travellers with medical exemptions, assist travellers with non-medical mask or face covering use, and communicate with travellers.

Best practices for transportation service providers:

Accommodating travellers with medical exemptions:

- Do your best to accommodate requests for additional space and appropriate distancing for travellers who are medically exempt from wearing a non-medical mask or face covering from other travellers and staff.
- Offer a pre-boarding option for travellers who are unable to wear a non-medical mask or face covering and consider special seating arrangements.
- Staff (e.g., security screeners) that are unable to maintain two meters distance should wear a non-medical mask or face covering and clear face shield where the traveller cannot wear a non-medical mask or face covering or face covering.
- If you require a medical exemption certificate from a traveller for non-medical mask or face covering use, understand that someone may need to fly to their destination first in order to receive their medical exemption certificate, and have a protocol for addressing this process. This situation may occur, for instance, in some remote or northern regions of Canada where medical care is not readily available.

Assisting travellers with non-medical mask or face covering use:

- To help children with disabilities that may make them resistant to mask-wearing, consider the following:
- encourage non-medical mask or face covering use by allowing the person to choose among different types of fabric face masks, demonstrating the use of masks on an object, such as a stuffed animal, or by using Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) cards available with a picture of a person with a non-medical mask or face covering on; and
- use of a multi-sensory or quiet room, if available, to facilitate face mask use in a low-stimulus environment.
- Consider the use of accessible clear masks to enable lip reading and communication through facial expressions and cues. Travellers should be aware that these types of non-medical masks or face coverings must meet Transport Canada safety regulations.

Staff communication with travellers:

- Clearly state the non-medical mask or face covering processes travellers are expected to follow during travel. Ensure employees communicate this information (e.g., how mandatory non-medical mask or face covering are being enforced, processes for acknowledging medical exemption certificates, processes for eating and drinking while using a non-medical mask or face covering, etc.).
- Clearly communicate designated eating and drinking times during travel so that persons who are blind and partially sighted know when those around them are removing their non-medical mask or face covering.
- Speak clearly, and perhaps, louder than you are accustomed to speaking if you speak softly or have a low voice. Wearing a non-medical mask or face covering muffles your voice and can make understanding your instructions difficult for some travellers.
- Let individuals who are blind or partially sighted know that you are wearing a non-medical mask or face covering prior to interacting with them.

- Consider a protocol that would allow staff who are behind a transparent barrier, or wearing a face shield, to temporarily remove their non-medical mask or face covering to enhance communication for those who rely on lip reading and facial expressions.

3.3 Hand Washing and Sanitization

Frequent hand washing and sanitization are critical behaviours to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These stations also come in a variety of formats and may be difficult to access or use. For example, hand hygiene and wipe dispensers come in a variety of designs, with different mechanisms to access the products and sometimes require 2-handed use. Wall mounted dispensers may not be placed at the right height to serve all individuals. Products placed on tables may require extended or awkward reach to access. Lastly, products offered to travellers by staff during the travel experience may be difficult to use for individuals with certain types of disabilities. Not knowing where these stations will be, being unable to perform the hand motions associated with hand washing and sanitization, and environmental sensitivities to alcohol-based hand rub or disinfectant wipes are a few ways that this protocol could impact those who live with a disability. The following best practices are recommended to enhance the accessibility of hand hygiene and sanitization stations throughout the travel experience.

Best practices for transportation service providers:

- Place hand sanitizer stations in high traffic areas where staff can easily direct travellers to them, and have the stations marked with clear signage at viewing angles available from a distance. Floor markers and signage should be provided to give people space and time to perform hand hygiene.
- Directly address travellers when providing hand sanitizer and describe what you are doing (e.g., “If you hold out your hands in front of you, I will dispense some sanitizer into your hands.”). Do not come in physical contact in order to direct their attention, especially for those who are blind or partially sighted.
- Recommend that travellers bring their own hand sanitizer and to keep it accessible throughout their trip.

- Staff should be aware that travellers may require assistance with sanitizing seating areas and other surfaces as required.
- Consider placing a textured, secure flooring underneath stand-alone sanitization stations for enhanced detection.
- For hand hygiene products placed on tables, consider using high contrast surfaces from the dispenser, borders and/or texture that can help individuals locate these products.
- Automated self-service kiosks should be sanitized frequently, and germicidal wipes or hand sanitizing units should be provided in these areas to allow travellers the option of sanitizing the kiosk prior to use.
- Washroom accessibility features, such as grab bars and automatic door push buttons should be sanitized frequently. Germicidal wipes should be provided in these areas to give travellers additional control and reassurance.
- Advise travellers of where they can expect enhanced cleaning protocols, and if possible, clearly label areas or objects as being clean and return them to a common area (e.g., sanitized wheelchairs that are available for assistance). Ideally, high touch surfaces should be sanitized again prior to use.
- Acknowledge and understand that some travellers might not be able to perform hand movements associated with hand washing/sanitization.
- Mobility and assistive equipment should be disinfected after each use. Where onboard equipment is provided, there should be additional disinfection procedures implemented to ensure they remain clean between each use. This process should be clearly communicated to travellers before they interact with equipment to reassure them that the equipment has been sanitized.

3.4 Communicating Information

Beyond following these three COVID-19 protocols of physical distancing, non-medical mask or face covering use, and frequent hand washing and sanitization, additional steps

should be taken to ensure information is communicated about the travel experience during the pandemic. Communicating information about infection prevention and control protocols can help travellers manage their journey and expectations, which could help reduce anxiety even before they leave their home. Attention to communication strategies and processes could elevate feelings of safety and comfort. The following recommendations focus on communicating information to enhance accessibility in travel experience during COVID-19.

Best practices for transportation service providers:

- Up-to-date information about COVID protocols should be easy to find and in an accessible format on web sites as well as available to all staff who may provide information to travellers. In addition, provide an accessible, online description of the travel journey that highlights what travellers can expect related to COVID-19 protocols, if possible.
- Accessible entrances and step-free routes that are blocked or closed because of new protocols should be communicated on web sites and consideration should be given, when blocking entrances, to make sure there are accessible routes.
- If temperature checks are required, ensure that staff are able to describe the process in a variety of ways, and ensure that the process is accessible by having hand-held temperature screening devices in addition to mounted thermal fever detection cameras.
- Place accessible signage to indicate when travellers with disabilities can go to the front of the line or enter a dedicated line (e.g., during the security screening process).
- Provide staff with different media to clearly communicate COVID-19 protocols to travellers (e.g., clear and descriptive verbal instructions, pencil and paper, speech-to-text and ASL/LSQ apps, dictation apps).
- Staff assisting travellers with navigation should verbally describe when they are stopping at a physical distancing marker, barrier, or are moving through a stanchion.

- Use body language as well as verbal cues to assist travellers, and accommodate their preferred method of communication to the best of your ability.
- Consider using a remote service desk employee that travellers can access during their trip, which would allow the employee to talk to travellers without having to wear a non-medical mask or face covering (e.g., a virtual assistant station, or COVID-19 “hotline”). If this service is offered, accessibility features should be enabled.
- Provide in-person or virtual traveller experience walk-throughs that individuals can participate in before travel (i.e., travellers can experience a pre-trip tour of what to expect before they begin their trip).
- Promote the use of accessible wayfinding technologies, such as Aira or BlindSquare, to enhance engagement, independence, and identification of physical distancing and sanitization stations through the space for those with a disability.

4. Travel Tips for Persons with Disabilities During COVID-19

The following section highlights potential steps that travellers can take to enhance their travel experience within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Bring your own hand sanitizer and keep it accessible throughout the trip.
- Verify cleaning protocols with your transportation service provider so you understand what is being done to ensure your safety.
- If you cannot wear a non-medical mask or face covering, make sure to have your medical exemption document with you and available at all times during your trip.
- Ask whether equipment provided by the carrier or terminal, such as wheelchairs, has been sanitized or ask for it to be sanitized before you use it.
- Verify what safety protocols are in place, such as temperatures being taken, touchless interaction, non-medical mask or face covering use, or distance

markers on the floor. This will help you know what to expect and allow you to communicate your needs.

- If any of the safety protocols interfere with your communication needs, inform the transportation service provider of your needs and how they can safely accommodate them – for example, if the use of non-medical mask or face covering prevents lip reading, or if you require communication by pen and paper.
- Make sure your transportation service provider is aware of your needs and ask them how they will respond to them in a safe way. For example, if you need guiding assistance, ask if the staff providing the assistance will be wearing personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Verify whether the airport or terminal offers a virtual visit or can provide a description of what to expect while using the facility – for example, whether entry and exit points have been reduced, or certain areas are blocked off or closed.