

# What you need to know: Rail cleanliness & hygiene: North America

August 12, 2020

In an effort to reassure travelers that they are doing all they can to protect them against COVID-19, rail operators and train companies are implementing new and improved cleanliness and hygiene processes. This report summarizes what a selection of train companies in North America are doing.

## Canada

### VIA Rail

National rail operator VIA Rail aims to keep passengers moving in safe, smart and thoughtful ways to ensure peace of mind. As the health and safety of passengers and employees is its top priority, VIA Rail has made changes to its services and implemented preventive health measures.<sup>1</sup>

#### Stress-free booking options

- Flexible booking allows travelers to cancel reservations at any time prior to departure, receiving a full refund and incurring zero service charges
- Number of seats sold on each train is limited to help maintain distance between passengers. This may not be possible on busier services
- Seats are assigned on boarding; passengers should ignore seat number of boarding passes

#### At the station

- Carry-on baggage assistance service is only offered for passengers with disabilities and/or limited mobility
- Checked baggage service is temporarily suspended within the Quebec-Windsor Corridor, but continues to be offered on all other routes
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection, using cleaning products approved by Health Canada, with stricter protocols for high-contact areas: door handles, handrails, washrooms, etc.
- Hand sanitizers are available at key points of contact

#### Keeping safe on board

- All passengers must wear a mask at all times in stations and on board VIA Rail trains, except when eating and drinking
- Masks are mandatory at all times for all employees on trains and in stations
- Any passenger not wearing a mask will be denied boarding and will be detained if refusing to wear one during the trip
- Young children and people with breathing difficulties unrelated to COVID-19 are exempt from mask wearing
- All hard surfaces in rail carriages are cleaned regularly and thoroughly: washrooms, tray tables, armrests, doors, etc.
- Additional employees are deployed onboard to sanitize trains while in operation
- Hand sanitizers are available at key points of contact

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<sup>1</sup> [VIA Rail](#), We're moving with you

- Complete meal and beverage service is suspended on all routes, replaced by a complimentary snack and water for all passengers
- On board, passengers are asked to maintain their distance from other travelers and rail staff.
- Number of available seats is reduced per train carriage, but passengers may be seated next to someone else on busier trains

### GO Transit

GO Transit is a regional public transit system serving Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe region, largely the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area.

As its services are operating a little differently to enable physical distancing, GO Transit recommends the passengers plan accordingly, visiting its website for the latest schedule changes and service updates.

Reflecting its commitment to the health, comfort and safety of travelers and staff, GO Transit has taken a number of COVID-19 safety measures under the Travel Safe on GO Transit initiative.<sup>2</sup>

#### Recommendations for travelers

- Don't travel if unwell
- Wear a face covering – it's mandatory, except for health or personal reasons
- Respect physical distancing and stay 2 meters apart
- Wash your hands frequently, or use one of the many hand sanitizing stations available
- Buy tickets online or load money onto the PRESTO card to avoid ticket queues

#### Rail staff

- Actively participate in increased cleaning
- Wear face coverings and practice physical distancing at work
- Receive regular health screening
- Have access to reusable face coverings, face shields, latex gloves and hand sanitizer

#### Safety measures

- Metrolinx Health & Safety kiosk (York Concourse) offers voluntary, self-services including temperature screening, cleanliness of personal belongings and safe practices for hand washing
- Trains or stations will be immediately taken out of service for deep cleaning if a person is suspected of having COVID-19
- Polycarbonate screens protect station staff
- Touchless payment options, such as the PRESTO! Pre-payment card, ensure no cash is handled
- Hand sanitizer stations have been installed in stations, at train entry zones and on more than 400 buses
- Hands-on assistance has been removed, unless needed
- Designated entry and exit doors are being trailed on GO trains
- Onboard directional arrows help passengers move safely inside trains and reduce face-to-face contact
- Plexi-glass seat dividers are being trialed to place a physical barrier between passengers

#### Cleaning measures

- Trains, buses and stations are cleaned and disinfected every day and every night
- Frequent deep cleaning using specialized HEPA vacuums, which remove tiny particles, including the droplets that transmit COVID-19

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<sup>2</sup> [GO Transit](#), Travel Safe on GO Transit

- Application of a long-acting antimicrobial germ protecting barrier to all high-touch areas in trains and stations
- Focus on 30+ high touchpoints, with cleaning several times a day
- Cleaning and disinfecting of door handrails, seatback handles, seat armrests, handrails, stanchions, elevator buttons, mobility areas and partitions
- Cleaning of all washrooms with frequent disinfection of door handles, buttons, taps/faucets, soap dispensers, door locks
- Immediate disposal of discarded masks and gloves

### Upcoming measures

- Metrolinx is rolling out more Health & Safety kiosks at stations throughout the Go network
- Safety messaging signs/decals are being deployed at Union Station, line stations, on platforms and on board trains to help passengers move around and keep a safe distance
- More hand sanitizing stations will be installed at stations and on trains

### Ontario Northland

The safety of its rail and bus passengers remains Ontario Northland's number one priority. In response to COVID-19, the company formed a Pandemic Response Committee, ensuring its COVID-19 preparations and protocols are aligned with public authorities and Transport Canada's recommendations.<sup>3</sup>

Ontario Northland has increased its disinfecting practices, wiping down all public touch areas after every trip. It encourages passengers to practice social distancing, wash hands regularly with soap and water, cough into elbows and stay home if exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms.

On board its trains, Ontario Northland has limited seating capacity to ensure physical distancing. Passengers are encouraged to reserve tickets in advance. Passengers must wear a face-covering or non-medical mask at the stations and when on board trains.

### U.S.

#### Amtrak

Amtrak claims to be leading the way by setting a new standard of travel with enhanced safety and cleaning measures.<sup>4</sup> It has implemented a number of cleaning, contact-free and convenience measures to simplify and safeguard the travel experience.

#### When you book

- Amtrak has waived all change and cancellation fees for reservations made by August 31
- Bookings are limited on reserved trains to allow for more physical distancing in seating areas
- Booking a private room – offered on many routes – offers privacy, more space and added comfort
- It is important for travelers to review any advisories or restrictions at their destination state

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<sup>3</sup> [Ontario Northland](#), COVID-19 What we are doing

<sup>4</sup> [Amtrak](#), Amtrak sets a new standard of travel

### Station procedures

- With the exception of the Auto Train, customers should arrive 30 minutes before departure, or 60 minutes if needing ticketing or other assistance
- Priority boarding has been discontinued, while boarding procedures have been adjusted in Washington DC, Chicago, Philadelphia and New York Penn Station.
- To reduce crowding at departure boards, the Amtrak app automatically delivers boarding gate and track information via push notifications
- Enhanced and more frequent cleaning has been introduced, with protective plastic barriers and screens fitted where necessary
- Frequently used surfaces, such as door handles, counter tops, seating areas and Quik Track kiosks are cleaned with EPA-registered disinfectants
- Signs are displayed at the busiest stations to indicate safe distances in high-traffic areas
- All customers and employees must wear face masks or an alternative facial covering while in stations

### Contact-free travel

- The Amtrak app enables customers to book, board, check train status and access information
- Amtrak encourages boarding with e-tickets, which conductors scan from the Amtrak app
- Amtrak is currently accepting cashless payment only

### Onboard

- All customers and staff must wear a face covering or mask while on trains. These may only be removed when in private rooms.
- Amtrak may remove passengers or ban them from future travel following non-compliance with its mask policy
- Bookings are limited on reserved trains to allow for physical distancing in seating areas
- Individuals traveling alone may use the adjacent seat for personal belongings, while friends and family members can find seating together
- Trains are deep cleaned and sanitized prior to service, with additional en route cleaning to disinfect restrooms and frequently touched surfaces
- All trains feature onboard filtration systems exchanging fresh air every 4-5 minutes
- An automatic, foot-operated door button enables passengers to move contactless between carriages
- As the train approaches a destination, conductor announcements advise when and where customers can disembark to minimize door crowding

### Food & beverages

- Café service is carry-out only
- When placing orders in the café, signs and markers remind passengers to keep their distance
- Protective plastic barriers have been installed on café counter tops
- A flexible dining service is offered on long-distance routes (except Auto Train), while customers in private rooms should opt for room service
- Physical distancing protocols remain in place for dining and lounge seating
- Café and dining cars accept cashless payment only

#### Note

The COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving, and the situation is changing on almost an hourly basis. The information presented in this report represents the latest view as at August 12, 2020. We have carefully researched and checked the information contained. However, we do not guarantee or warrant the correctness, completeness or topicality of this article and do not accept any liability for any damage or loss as a result of the use of the information contained within this article.

Do you have questions or comments regarding this report? Please email [mike.eggleson@bcdtravel.co.uk](mailto:mike.eggleson@bcdtravel.co.uk) to share your thoughts.