

COVID-19 Transitioning – Standards and Guidance for Tourist Guides

These following obligatory conditions are issued under the Public Health Act Chapter 465 of the Laws of Malta and require strict adherence. Failure to adhere to these conditions will result in enforcement procedures as provided by the Act.

Standards to be observed by tourist guides

- a) Exercise the right of refusal of participation in a tour/visit of persons if they are visibly unwell or have respiratory symptoms.
- b) Subject persons to temperature checks for the presence of fever, with those having a temperature of 37.2° Celsius (99° Fahrenheit) or higher to be denied participation in the tourism activity.
- c) Provide an appropriate 70% alcohol hand-rub and ensure that all persons sanitise their hands prior to the start of the tour.
- d) Adopt crowd management techniques as necessary to prevent different tourist groups from interacting with each other in queues and touristic sites.
- e) Group sizes are limited to a maximum of 15 people, including the tourist guide.
- f) Ensure that every person keeps a minimum of 2 metres from each other in all directions, even in queues.
- g) Ensure that whenever entering any touristic site that it can handle the number of tour participants with regards to the standard that the maximum number of persons that the site can hold at any one time is one person per 4 square metres.
- h) Ensure that the method of transportation chosen adheres to the standards applicable to them.
- i) Ensure wearing of masks or visors by all tour participants.
- j) Systematic cleaning and disinfection before and after every use of all devices used such as audio guides, wireless guidance system receivers or any other items that are handled by more than one person

Core concepts in COVID-19 transitioning

The guidance below has been developed to help you protect you and the groups that you guide during the COVID-19 transition phase. This guidance needs to be referred to and applied in addition to all the other recommended good practices to protect from and safeguard against the spread of novel coronavirus.

These procedures have been formulated for tourist guides to ensure rigid compliance in the fields of social distancing, enhanced hygienic practices and the minimisation of COVID-19 infection risks during their work.

1. How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 presents with coughing or sneezing which release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets can fall on nearby surfaces and objects - such as counters, railings, desks, tables, machinery or telephones. Other frequently touches surfaces such as door handles, intercoms, lift buttons are other surfaces which are frequently touched and can become contaminated. People can catch COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Standing within two metres of a person with COVID-19 for a prolonged period, one can catch the disease by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by them

Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age. People with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness.

2. Protection of vulnerable persons

All vulnerable persons are at increased risk of developing serious complications if infected by the COVID-19 virus. Vulnerable persons should be discouraged from taking part in organised tours with groups due to the risk of infection.

3. Knowledge of symptoms

Tourist guides must be well aware of the symptoms of COVID infection and how to take the necessary action should these appear. Common symptoms may include any of the following: fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny or congested nose, muscle or joint pains, tiredness, headache, loss or altered sense of taste or smell, headache, vomiting or diarrhoea. Persons who are ill, including those with minor symptoms, must NOT participate in tours. If tourist guides encounter a tourist with symptoms, phone 111 or the primary health care centre and follow the advice given.

4. Before setting off

As far as possible, booking arrangements and payment should be settled by means not requiring face-to-face contact (e.g. online or on the phone) and utilising contactless methods to minimise direct contact with tourists as well as the handling of cash. If handling cash cannot be avoided, guides should carefully sanitise their hands after doing so. A record should be kept of the names, contact details and date and time of the tour for all persons in the group to facilitate contact tracing should this be required.

In cases where the guide is in touch with the tourist group prior to the start of the tour, the guide should pass on information regarding the public health measures tourists are expected to follow and the precautions being taken prior to the day of the tour. Where feasible this information should be passed on in the tourist group's mother tongue or another language they are fluent in. This will help increase the likelihood of compliance (e.g. tourists would be forewarned that they need to have a mask and/or visor with them to visit certain sites). Guides should provide a brief explanation of what is expected at the start of the tour, even if this information has also been passed on beforehand.

Information provided should cover:

- handwashing, hygiene and respiratory etiquette:
 - encouraging frequent handwashing with soap and water when possible and use of alcohol-based hand sanitiser when outdoors
 - covering coughs and sneezes with a clean tissue or use their elbow (and no spitting)
 - avoiding touching face, eyes, nose and mouth
 - disposing of used tissues, used masks and cigarette butts hygienically, e.g. in closed bins with lids that do not need to be opened by hand
 - having no intentional physical contact such as shaking hands, hugging and patting backs
- use of face masks and visors where required, including how to wear and dispose of PPE items properly
- social distancing and other protective behaviours (such as to avoid touching surfaces)
It is very important for persons to maintain a distance of at least 2 meters from each other at all times including in queues and in touristic sites. No physical contact is allowed.

At the site covid19health.gov.mt, one can find further guidance regarding the good practice listed above. Guides should not allow tourists to join the group if they are visibly unwell or exhibiting respiratory symptoms, instructing them to call the 111 or +(356)21324086 helpline instead. Similarly guides should not report for work if they are unwell, even if symptoms are mild. Guides should have a protocol in place regarding actions to be taken if a tourist develops symptoms of COVID-19 during the guided tour, in line with health authorities' recommendations. This should include advising the symptomatic person to stay apart from the rest of the group, put on a mask and contact the 111 helpline.

5. Social distancing and group sizes

Social distancing needs to be maintained. Guides must keep a two (2) metre distance from tourists. Tourists also need to maintain social distancing from each other, keeping two metres apart unless they are part of the same family unit/sharing a room on the trip i.e. couples and family units are not expected to socially distance from each other, but need to maintain social distancing from other travellers. Social distancing needs to be kept up at all times including when moving from one place to another.

It is suggested that guides engage with smaller group sizes than previously. Group sizes are limited to a maximum of 15 people, including the tourist guide. Guides should keep in mind the following considerations to help them determine what group size will be manageable in these changed circumstances:

- size of group that is feasible to maintain control of in view of the two metre distancing that will need to be kept in place throughout the tour
- size of group that will allow the guide to have their voice heard by all group members taking into consideration social distancing (unless devices such as wireless guiding systems are being used – if headphones are used these should be disposable, or else tourist is advised to use their own headphones)

- restrictions in place with respect to capacity of transport vehicles being used for carriage of tourists (see below)
- restrictions in place with respect to capacity and group sizes at the museums and sites of interest that are on the itinerary (see below)

6. Outdoor sites and walking tours

While masks/visors are not mandatory outdoors, social distancing must still be maintained. When other tour groups are encountered, guides should coordinate between themselves to avoid crowding and help ensure social distancing. Guides should not make stops in crowded areas but choose an area where their tour group can maintain social distancing.

7. Museums and indoor cultural sites

Guides are advised to familiarise themselves with the COVID-19 Transitioning – Obligatory Conditions and Guidelines for museums and other cultural places¹ so they are aware about what is expected of them and the tourists they are guiding when visiting such sites. They are also advised to plan ahead and check whether the attractions they are planning to visit with their tour group have any additional restrictions in place. Guides should be aware that cultural sites are operating with capacity limitations and might also have group size limits and time slot allocation in place. These restrictions should also be considered when planning the tour and determining the size of the tour group. Guides should advise tourists not to touch the exhibits and encourage them to wash their hands after they come in contact with high-touch surfaces such as doors, counters and railings. Wireless guidance systems provide an effective means of communicating with all group members while still allowing social distancing.

8. Transport issues

Any coach, minibus, minivan or tail-lift carry up to 50% of its maximum better observe the social distance of 2



of their family party/that they are not sharing a room with while travelling. The first row of seats behind the driver and the guide should be left empty. If tourists will be alighting and disembarking from the vehicle multiple times during the tour, they should be advised to keep to the same seat throughout wherever possible.

van being used to transport tourists shall capacity, so that passengers on board can metres from other persons that are not part

Hand sanitiser should be provided to tourists prior to entering the vehicle and guides should ensure that this is applied before allowing the individual to embark. Masks/visors are required while on board the vehicle, including for the driver and the guide.

Air conditioning systems in vehicles can be switched on. Vehicles shall avoid using the recirculated air option for the vehicle's ventilation and shall operate the AC with ventilation selector on outside air. Typically, this is presented with the following icon:

¹ These can be accessed here: https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Obligatory_Conditions_And-Guidelines_For_Museums_And_Other_Cultural_Places.pdf

On long trips, either keep windows slightly open or open windows frequently to ventilate with fresh air. All vehicle doors are to be kept open whenever the vehicle stops to board or alight passengers during a trip and at the end of each trip. Air-conditioning filters should be cleaned well and maintained properly.

Whilst disinfection of the vehicle being used to transport tourists is the responsibility of the individual/company providing the transport service, guides should confirm that the transport service provider is operating a policy of disinfecting the vehicle before it is used by a new set of passengers.

9. Restaurants and bars

Guides are to remind tourists to refer to the standards available on www.covid19health.gov.mt

[Standards for Bars, Clubs and Similar Establishments](#) (19 August 2000)

[Standards for Restaurants, Pools and Hotel Accommodation](#) (24 August 2020)

10. Devices and other items

If guides distribute devices such as audio guides, wireless guidance system receivers or any other items that are handled by more than one person, these should be systematically cleaned and disinfected before and after each use. Cleaning products and disinfectants should always be used according to manufacturers' instructions. Disposable headphones are recommended. Guides should consider whether the use of such devices can be substituted by the use of mobile apps.

It is suggested that guides should have their own microphone/headset and not share such items between guides. High-touch items such as leaflets, cards and brochures should not be distributed. Instead information can be passed on using digital means. Further guidance regarding cleaning and disinfection can be found in the 'Guidance for offices and workspaces'² on covid19health.gov.mt.

² These can be accessed here: <https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Guidance For Offices And Workspaces.pdf>