



Passenger Vessel Association

Reopening Guidelines: Getting the Domestic Passenger Vessel Industry Back Underway

While the vast majority of the nation's 6,300 domestic passenger vessels have been idled by the COVID-19 pandemic, public and private ferries across the country are continuing to provide transportation services including lifeline services to carry healthcare and other essential workers to critical jobs. As restrictions at the federal, state, and local level are eased and domestic passenger vessels are allowed to return to service, the health and safety of the vessel's passengers and crew must remain at the forefront of company operations.

With federal and state governments establishing guidelines for reopening businesses, the Passenger Vessel Association (PVA) recommends that domestic passenger vessels regardless of service develop and implement written procedures and practices for when and how they will reopen and provide service. The recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) concerning limiting the effects of coronavirus form the basis PVA's guidelines. Other agencies and organizations at the federal, state and local level may also have directives, guidance, and recommendations that could impact vessel operations as long as public health emergency declarations remain in place.

The domestic passenger vessel industry consists of a wide array of vessel types and operations. Owners and operators will need to assess the impact of applicable health and safety directives and guidance when determining appropriate mitigation strategies. The below guidance from the Passenger Vessel Association, through its Safety and Security Committee, is designed to assist vessel owners and operators in developing procedures and practices consistent with the most recent directives and guidance allowing for the resumption of vessel operations.

The Virus

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) can cause mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. In some serious cases, COVID-19 can be fatal.¹ No existing vaccines prevent COVID-19. This means that the only known way to prevent illness is to avoid exposure to the virus. Current information indicates that the virus is mainly spread person-to-person through the respiratory droplets an infected person produces when they cough, sneeze, or talk. Recent studies indicate that an infected person can transmit the virus even if they are not showing symptoms. This means that someone who appears and feels healthy could spread the virus without knowing it.²

¹[CDC Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions](#)

²[CDC How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)



Federal Reopening Guidelines

As part of the federal government's reopening guidelines employers have been asked to develop and implement appropriate policies, in accordance with Federal, State, and local regulations and guidance, and informed by industry best practices, regarding:

- Social distancing and protective equipment
- Temperature checks
- Sanitation
- Use and disinfection of common and high-traffic areas
- Business travel

Employers are to monitor workforce for symptoms associated with COVID-19.

- Do not allow symptomatic people to physically return to work until cleared by a medical provider.
- Develop and implement policies and procedures for workforce contact tracing following employee positive COVID-19 test.

Company Guidance

Companies should establish and implement policies and procedures that monitor employee health, reinforce healthy hygiene practices, establish social distancing, use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and to ensure vessels and facilities are appropriately cleaned and disinfected.

These policies and associated procedures should be incorporated into existing company health and safety policies and vessel operations.

Monitoring Employee Health

Develop health screening procedures for employees, including overnight crew to identify symptoms of, and exposure to, a respiratory illness.

Implement continuous employee self-monitoring protocols for symptoms and temperature measurement to identify when employees are starting to exhibit symptoms.

- If employees feel sick, have them stay home.
- Employees need to self-isolate and inform supervisor immediately if they develop a fever (100.4°F / 38°C or higher), begin to feel feverish, or develop other signs or symptoms of sickness including coughing, and shortness of breath.
- If their condition worsens, they should contact their doctor.
- Consider temperature checks for employees reporting for work and departing from work.

Develop procedures to report and manage ill personnel, including crew members and passengers.

- Coast Guard Hazardous Condition reporting while underway. See Coast Guard Marine Safety Information Bulletin 06-20 for more information.



- Protocols for employees who have been or may have been exposed to COVID-19 positive individuals:
 - Critical Infrastructure Employees in transportation (ferries) may continue to work. See [Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers](#)
 - Regular Employees should stay home as per [CDC guidance](#)
- Actions to be taken when crew member/employee tests positive:
 - If the employee is home, they will stay home until they get return to work authorization from their doctor.
 - If the employee becomes sick during the work day, they should be sent home immediately.
 - Surfaces in their workspace should be cleaned and disinfected.
 - Companies should initiate Contact Tracing with local public health staff:
 - Compile Information on persons who had contact with the ill employee during the time the employee had symptoms and two (2) days prior to symptoms.
 - Others at the facility with close contact within six (6) feet of the employee during this time would be considered exposed.

Establish or revise employee travel policies to incorporate [CDC travel guidance](#)

- Limit non-essential business travel
- Ensure Critical Infrastructure Employees have appropriate documentation for local travel during periods of shelter in place and other travel limiting orders.

Healthy Hygiene Practices

To reduce spread of respiratory infections including COVID-19, CDC recommends that companies encourage employees to:

- Perform recommended [hand hygiene](#) by washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60 to 95% alcohol.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Determine protocols for wearing face coverings and disposable gloves. Many local municipalities will defer to CDC guidelines and require face coverings.
- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing or use the inside of the individual's elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Learn more about coughing and sneezing etiquette on the CDC website.
- Clean AND disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, and doorknobs.
- Avoid using other employees' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use.
- Use foot operated trash containers with lids.



Social Distancing

Domestic passenger vessels come in all shapes and sizes, and it may be challenging to implement social distancing protocols. At this time, recommended spacing between people is six (6) feet even with mask requirements in place. Other modes of transportation (rail, bus, subway, etc.) share the same challenges, and in some cases State Executive Orders have stated maintaining social distancing across all modes of transportation may not be possible.

- Consider reducing the number of passengers permitted on board to help maintain social distancing. Some local municipalities have implemented reductions as a percentage of total occupancy determined by the Fire Marshal or used a persons per square foot limitation.
- Any social distancing measures based on square footage should take into account crew areas as well as passenger areas.
- In some areas onboard the vessels, consider taping off sections of seats to help maintain social distancing.
- Holding areas used prior to boarding should allow for social distancing. Design a process to ensure guests stay separate while waiting to board the vessel. The process can include floor markings, outdoor distancing, increased boarding times, waiting in cars, etc.
- Consider an exit from the vessel/facility separate from the entrance so that disembarking passengers do not interact with boarding passengers.
- Provide hand sanitizer for guests to use, including contactless hand sanitizing stations.
- Where possible, workstations should be staggered so employees avoid standing directly opposite one another or next to each other. Where six feet of separation is not possible, consider other options (e.g., face coverings) and increase the frequency of surface cleaning and sanitizing.
- Use on board vessel announcements and signage to request passengers adhere to social distancing.
- Thank passengers for their patience as company personnel work to ensure their safety.

Dinner Boat Specific Guidance:

- Consider requiring waitstaff to wear face coverings (as recommended by the CDC) if they have direct contact with guests.
- Update floor plans for common dining areas, redesigning seating arrangements to ensure at least six feet of separation between table setups. Limit party size at tables to no more than the established “maximums approved” as recommended by CDC or approved by local and state government. Where practical, especially in booth seating, physical barriers are acceptable. Consider a reservations-only business model or call-ahead seating to better space diners.
- Evaluate alternatives to buffet style self-service arrangements. Consider staff serving passengers from buffet.
- Consider cashier station-based order and payment of meals, utilizing food runners with identifying table markers. This will result in less floor staff and customer interface.



- Use technology solutions where possible to reduce person-to-person interaction: mobile ordering and menu tablets; text on arrival for seating; contactless payment

Personal Protective Equipment

Ensure all employees are trained and have access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) as needed. PPE includes but is not limited to disposable gloves, eye and face protection, gowns, and masks.

- Instruct crew members and other staff in the [proper storage, use, and disposal of PPE](#)
- Wrong use or handling of PPE can increase the spread of disease

Establish and implement policies and procedures for employees and passengers regarding the use of face coverings and personal protective equipment to reduce the risk of COVID-19 among employees and passengers.

- Most jurisdictions are following CDC guidelines requiring face coverings for all individuals when in public. No mask, no boarding the vessel.
- Vulnerable individuals should wear face coverings when at work. Vulnerable individuals are:
 - Older individuals, 65 and older.
 - Individuals with serious underlying health conditions, including high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune system is compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer and other conditions requiring such therapy.
- Face coverings should be kept clean. Cloth face coverings can be machine washed.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Implement a stringent vessel sanitation and disinfection regime. Particular attention should be paid to high-touch surfaces, common areas, and passenger spaces.

- Identify and purchase proper chemicals and PPE needed for cleaning and disinfecting various surfaces throughout the vessel, facility, and materials (stores, equipment, luggage, etc.) moved from shore to the vessel.
- Dirty surfaces can be cleaned with soap and water prior to disinfection. To disinfect, use products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2, the cause of COVID-19, and are appropriate for the surface. See EPA and ABS guidance in the reference section for more product information.
- Consider using disposable towels or rags when cleaning and disinfecting surfaces.
- Conduct proper pre and post cruise cleaning.
- Operating station cleaning - Wipe down the entire wheelhouse with a disinfecting cleaner including chart table, instruments, chairs, helm, consoles, radar control panels, VHF radios, binoculars, pens/pencils, etc.



- Cleaning/Disinfecting high touch areas throughout the Day:
 - Doorknobs, Door and Window Handles
 - Faucet and Toilet Handles
 - Gangway railings
 - Chair armrests
 - Tabletops
 - Vessel railings
 - Any additional High Touch Areas you may have on your vessels
- After hours deep cleaning/disinfecting:
 - Consider use of third party cleaning company capable of disinfecting vessel surfaces
 - Use fogging (electrostatic) technology with recommended chemicals (see resources)
 - Use UV technology with appropriate PPE and safety protocols (see resources)
- Bar and Snack Bar Sanitation:
 - Disinfecting of Food Preparation and Bar Surfaces before and after service
- Cleaning and disinfecting of material loaded aboard the vessel may be guided by current information from the New England Journal of Medicine dated March 17, 2020, which studied the persistence of COVID-19 virus on various materials:
 - Cardboard 24 Hours
 - Plastic 72 Hours
 - Stainless Steel 48 Hours
 - Copper 8 Hours

Note: Other materials were not tested. Use maximum persistence as guide
- Alternatively, material to be loaded on board the vessel can be placed in a warehouse or holding area until the virus is no longer viable (persistent).

Vessel/Facility Operations

Manage crew/employee rotation to minimize potential cross contamination.

- Stagger shifts for reporting to and departing from work.
- Consider dedicated crews on vessels.
- Have back up crews/replacement personnel available in the event crew members fall ill.
- Establish clear social distancing guidance for crew when on break. Congregating in breakrooms is discouraged.

Restrict personnel from the bridge where practicable. Drinking and eating should be avoided.

- Some operating stations on smaller vessels are located within the passenger compartment. Establish perimeter 6 feet from the operator. Consider partitions either solid or virtual (carpet tape).



Develop procedures to restrict visitors to limited and specific areas of the vessel as much as possible.

- Remind third-party delivery drivers and any suppliers that you have internal distancing requirements.
- Consider establishing a reception area on the on the dock where visitors check in.
- With the exception of passengers, personnel allowed onboard vessels should be limited to company personnel, law enforcement (local and Coast Guard), surveyors, tech reps, and medical personnel.
- Closely monitor and restrict outside access to onboard berthing as much as possible.

Facility owners and operators should implement procedures to help ensure the safety and security of their personnel, reducing impacts to facility operations.

- Limit as far as possible the number of interactions between vessel and facility personnel to only those essential for operation and supply of the vessel.
- Encourage cooperation between vessel crews and facility/port workers to develop and comply with screening protocols or procedures to address COVID-19.
- Consider the installation of hand washing or hand sanitizing stations at the base of vessel gangways.

Working with local law enforcement partners, companies should develop contingency procedures for dealing with noncompliant individuals and groups.

Passenger/Public Interface

It is the nature of the domestic passenger vessel industry that there will be interaction between vessel crews and their passengers.

Commit to a safe working environment for crew/employees regarding passenger interface:

- Reduce Cash Handling between Guests and Employees.
- Credit/Debit Card only at onboard POS systems.
- Credit/Debit Card only at Ticket Booth/Kiosk.
- Cash Tips still allowed onboard.
- Reduce Ticket Exchanges between Guests and Employees.
- Pre-purchased ticket sales go right to the boat and check in.
- Public address systems - Issue microphones to tour guides/narrators to eliminate shared use.
- Reposition or reroute ticket printers forward facing allowing customer to collect their own tickets, thus reducing contact.
- Photo Operations:
 - Consider tripod mount camera shots, with remote control. Explore digital only option or minimize customer- photographer exchange when selling
- Install Plexiglas barrier in front of cash register. Provide appropriate distance for the remaining bar counter, minimizing server-guest contact.



Improve communications with passengers and the public:

- Online
 - Company commitment to passengers – Good Personal Hygiene and Increased Sanitation practices have been implemented.
 - Passenger commitment to operator if you are sick – Stay Home!
- Vessel and Facility
 - Signage posted regarding social distancing, wearing of masks, and location of hand sanitizer stations.
 - Public announcements regarding social distancing.
- Ticket Kiosk
 - Signage posted about Credit/Debit cards only.
 - Signage posted about Staying Home if you are sick or displaying symptoms.
- Snack Bars/Bars
 - Signage posted about Credit/Debit cards only.
- Heads
 - Signage posted about Proper Hand Washing Techniques.

About the Passenger Vessel Association

PVA is the national trade association for U.S.-flagged passenger vessels of all types. It represents the interests of owners and operators of dinner boat vessels, sightseeing and excursion vessels, passenger and vehicular ferries, private charter vessels, whale watch operators, gaming vessels, and small overnight cruise vessels. PVA has been in operation for nearly 50 years and represents approximately 600 vessel and associate members. Its vessel-operating members range from small family businesses with a single boat to companies with several large vessels in different locations, to governmental agencies operating ferries. Its associate members are key suppliers to the passenger vessel industry, including marine architects, vessel builders and decorators, insurance companies, publishers, food supply companies, computer software vendors, marine equipment suppliers, engine manufacturers, and others. <http://www.passengervessel.com>

Additional References

PVA encourages consulting the references and links provided below for more detailed information.

- [CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#): Current public health and safety information on COVID-19.
- [Coronavirus.gov](#): Public information provided by the U.S. government related to Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)
- [USA.gov Coronavirus](#): What the U.S. government is doing in response to Coronavirus (COVID-19).
- [Coronavirus Guidelines for America](#): The president's Coronavirus guidelines for America.



- [Coronavirus Frequently Asked Questions](#): Interagency website, organized by the White House Coronavirus Task Force, for definitive information on the public's most frequently asked questions.
- [FEMA Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Response](#): Updates on federal partners working with state, local, tribal and territorial governments to execute a whole-of-America response to the pandemic.
- [FEMA Rumor Control](#): A resource helping the public distinguish between rumors and facts regarding the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
- [Coast Guard Marine Safety Information Bulletins on Novel Coronavirus](#): Provides Coast Guard guidance on reporting and infection control measures for vessels.
- [EPA Disinfectant List](#): Provides a list of EPA approved products that are effective against COVID-19 and other SARS-CoV-2 related viruses.
- ABS Guidance Notes on Response Measures to Covid-19 for the Marine and Offshore Industries – 2020: Go to www.eagle.org for the latest guidance.
- [Food Safety and the Coronavirus Disease 2019](#): FDA guidelines and references for food service establishments.
- [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#): OSHA reference document for COVID-19 related issues.