



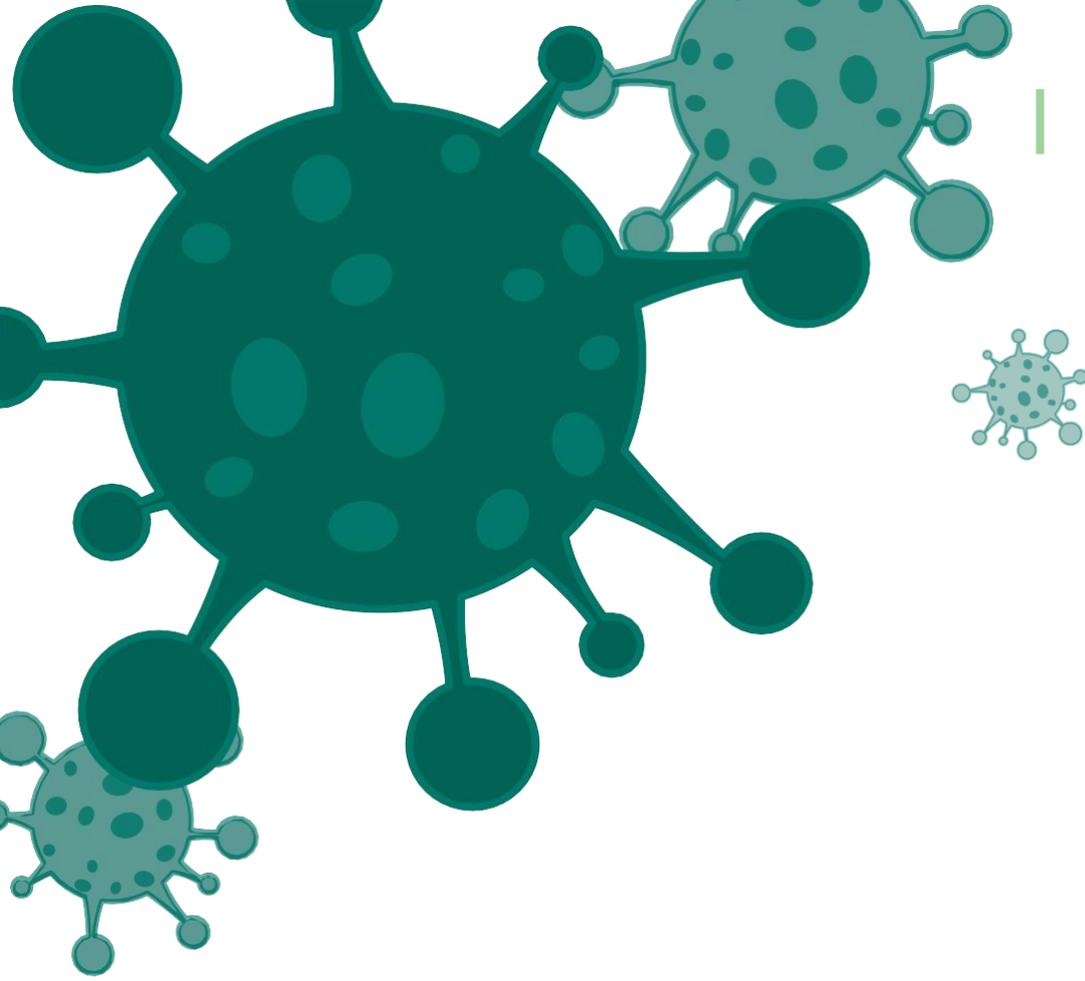
TOURISM COUNCIL OF BHUTAN

TOURISM SERVICES UNDER THE NEW NORMAL

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES | OCTOBER 2021

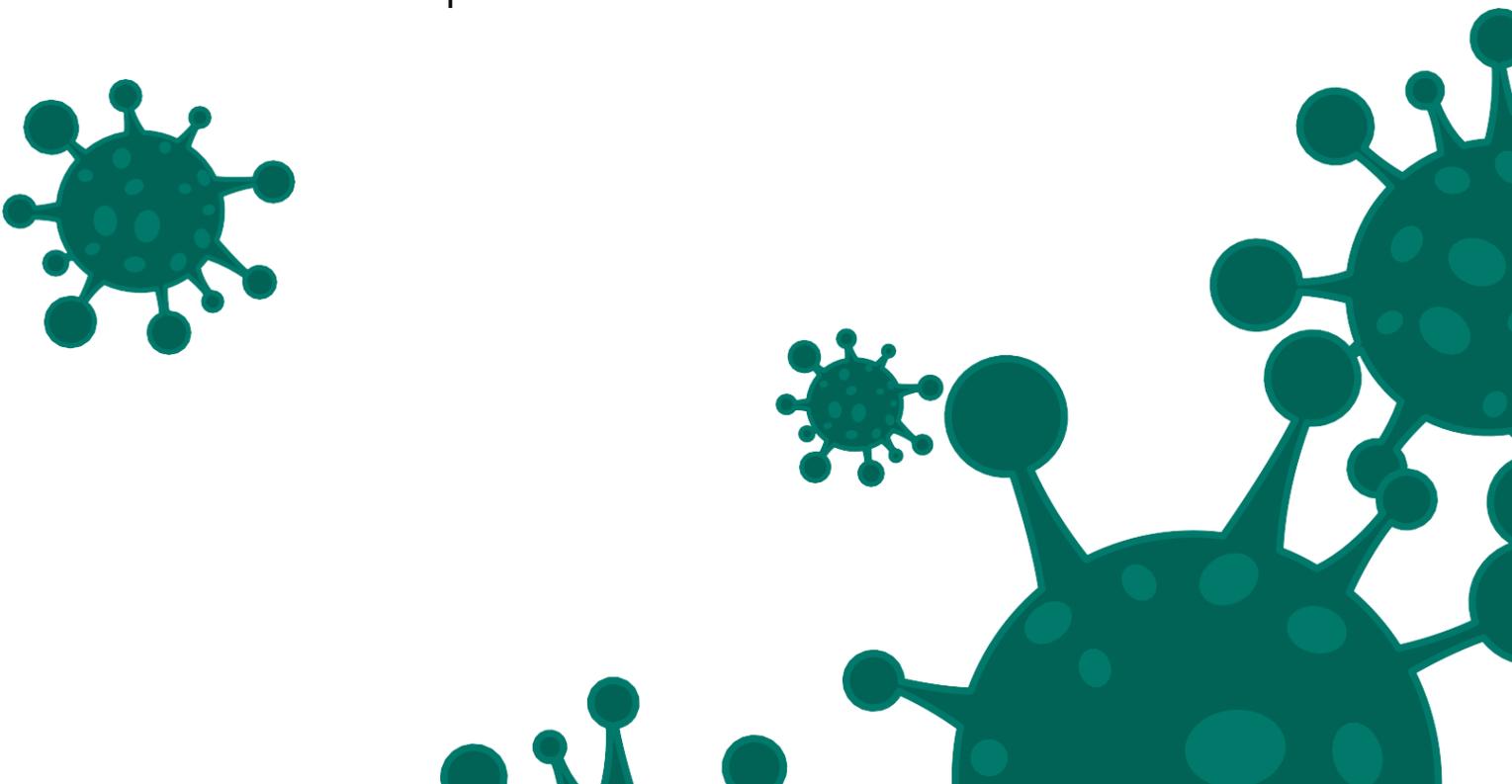
***TRAINING FOR TOUR OPERATORS AND TOUR
GUIDES***





Disclaimer:

This document provides operational guidelines on tourism services under the new normal and the minimum requirements to help ensure safety and confidence for conducting tourism businesses and activities amid COVID-19 pandemic. However, the standards and protocols may change overtime as the nature of the pandemic evolves. As such, it is important for all parties to keep updated with the latest standards and protocols.



INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges and impacts across the globe with tourism being one of the severely impacted sectors. Travel restrictions were introduced after the detection of the first imported positive case on March 5, 2020 in the country. COVID-19 safety measures and protocols were implemented for the general public as well as for incoming individuals (Bhutanese and foreigners) with mandatory quarantine and testing requirements. However, with the successful vaccination of more than 95% of eligible population, and with the first tourist visiting the country on August 9, 2021, Bhutan is gearing towards new normal tourism.

This document provides details on new normal tourism, the entry procedure, operational guidelines for tourism service providers for facilitating tourist visitations under COVID-19 protocol. Among others, the following are the objectives of the document:

1. To carry out tourism activities in compliance with health and safety protocols;
2. To guide and prepare tourism service providers for the new normal tourism in concurrence to health and safety protocols; and
3. Create awareness and disseminate relevant information on new normal tourism under existing COVID-19 protocol.



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Section I

General COVID-19 information

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. It was first learnt by the WHO towards the end of December 2019 following a report of a cluster of cases of 'viral pneumonia' in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. It involves the nose, throat and lungs.



Signs and symptoms of COVID-19

Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness. Some will become seriously ill. Older people and those with underlying medical conditions are more likely to develop serious illness.

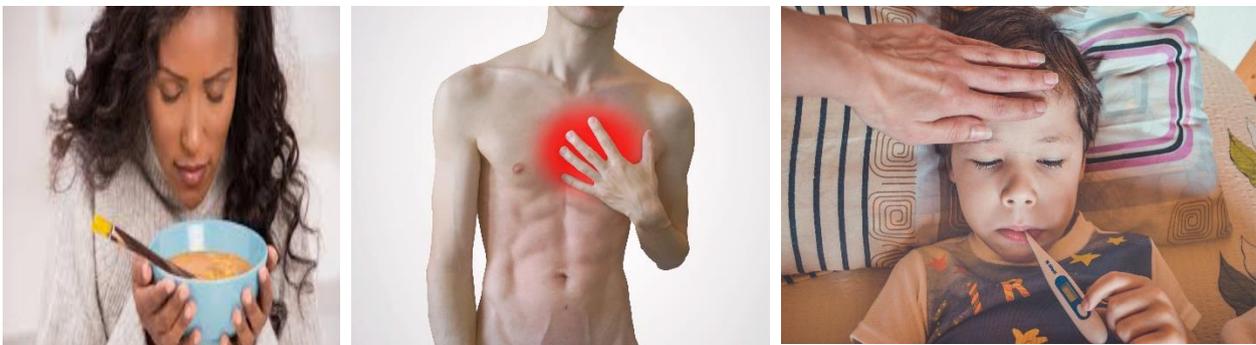
The most common symptoms include dry cough, fever and fatigue.



Besides this, less common symptoms include loss of taste or smell, sore throat, headache, muscular or joint pain, nausea and diarrhea, dizziness, etc.



The severe symptoms include shortness of breath, loss of appetite, chest pain and high fever. In the long run, more severe symptoms involving neurological complications such as strokes and brain inflammations are experienced.



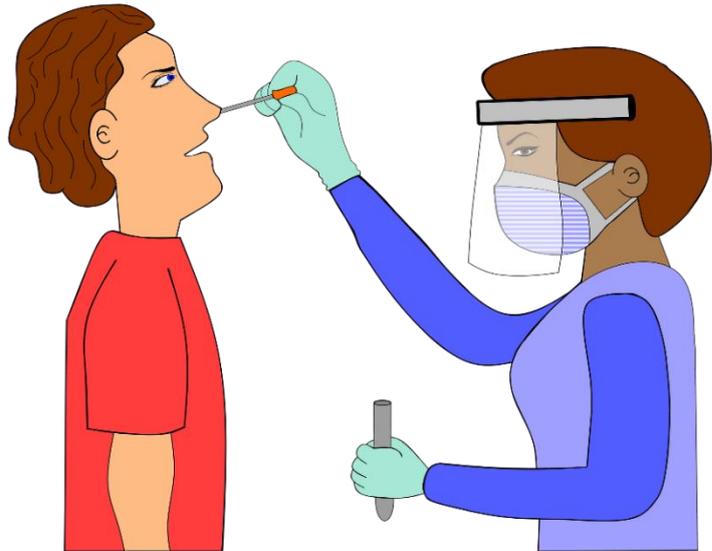
Risk for COVID-19 infection

Generally, everyone is at risk and can be severely ill or die from COVID-19 at any age. However, elderly people aged 60 and above and people with underlying health conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, lung/heart problems, cancer, etc. are at most risk from COVID-19.



Requirement for tests and medical attention

About 80% of those who develop symptoms of COVID-19 recover from the disease without having to visit hospital for treatment. About 15% become seriously ill and require oxygen or other breathing aids. About 5 % enter into critical conditions and need intensive care. In case of severe symptoms such as high fever and/or cough associated with shortness of



breath, chest pain or pressure, or loss of speech or movement, one should seek medical care immediately. However, one should get tested whether or not he/she has COVID-19 symptoms. Generally, it takes about 5-6 days from the time of exposure to COVID-19 for the symptoms to be visible. However, the symptoms can begin anywhere from 1-14 days after the exposure time. This is why people who have been exposed to or suspected to have been exposed to the virus are advised to remain at home and stay away from others for 14 days. Thus, there is possibility for transmission of the disease from an asymptomatic person. That is why health authorities around the world recommend public to take basic precautions at all times such as wearing face mask, washing/sanitizing hands, avoiding crowds/gatherings, observing cough etiquettes, etc. and to stay in quarantine if one has been in contact with infected people.

Mode of transmission

The COVID -19 can spread from person to person through following two basic ways:

- a) Droplets transmission, and
- b) Contact transmission

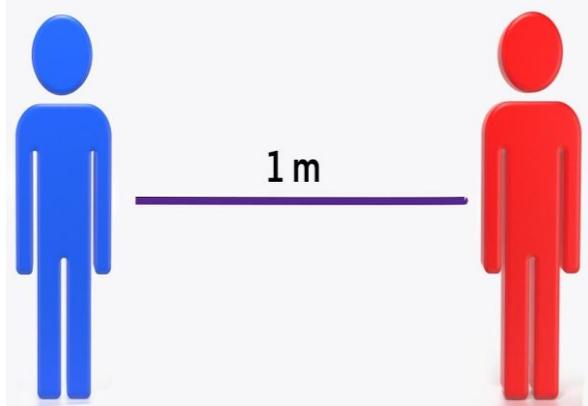


The COVID-19 is transmitted through respiratory droplets. It is also possible to get infected if one comes in close contact with an infected person, or comes in contact with the objects that have been in contact with the infected person. Researchers around the world have shown that the virus can persist on surfaces outside human body for few hours or up to several days depending on the nature of the surface. Some studies have also suggested that the virus is transmitted through aerosols especially in closed and inadequately ventilated rooms where infected people spend long time interacting with others. Therefore, it is recommended to observe all the basic precautions and stay in quarantine if one is infected or has been in close contact with an infected person to prevent transmission of the disease.

Prevention of COVID-19 transmission

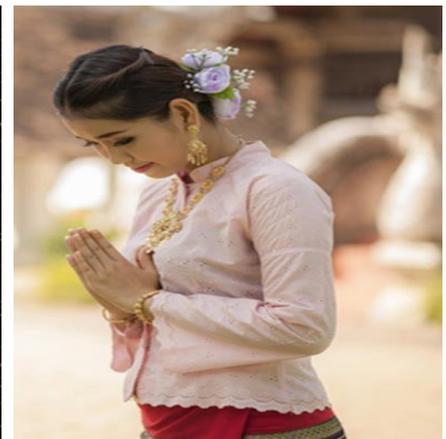
Physical practices

- Avoid social gathering, crowd and close contact
- Keep physical distancing of minimum 1 meter (3 feet) apart



Greeting etiquette

- Avoid handshake
- Follow traditional/no-touch methods



Proper Cough & Sneeze Etiquette



Spit

Avoid spitting of saliva, snort and sputum in the open space.



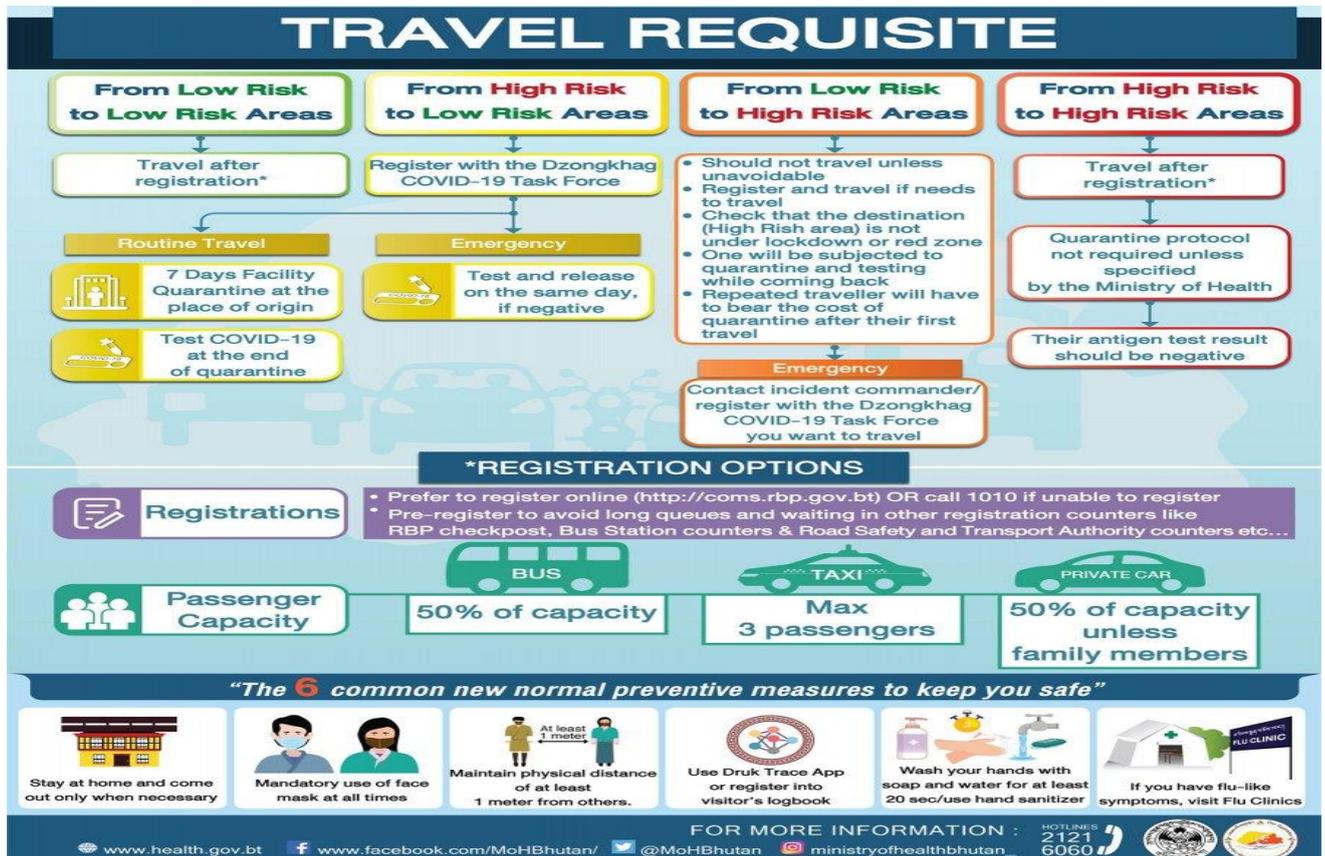
Personal waste

- Throw face mask, and other contaminated items in a lined container/bin with lid
- Dispose the bin properly



Essential Information

Movement within Bhutan



In addition to the above prescribed protocols, travelers must also keep in mind that random testing might be done at strategic locations on the way by the designated officials deployed by the Ministry of Health. In case a traveler develops COVID-19 symptoms he/she can visit the nearest COVID-19 flu clinic or contact the available health contact numbers.

Mobile Apps for COVID-19

Druk trace app: The Royal Government of Bhutan has developed a mobile app called “Druk Trace” for both Andorid and IOS devices. One can download the app from Google Play Store (Android) and App Store (IOS). Druk Trace app is used for community tracing in Bhutan without asking for any individual information. The app has three main features:

1. Verification of mobile number: Mobile number will be used to inform individuals in case of positive contact scenario. Only valid Bhutan phone number will be accepted for registration.
2. QR Code Generation: Generate QR code for public places, transport, events, etc.
3. QR Code Scanner: Scan the generated QR codes to help contact trace you in cases of community transmission.

Important contact numbers for COVID-19

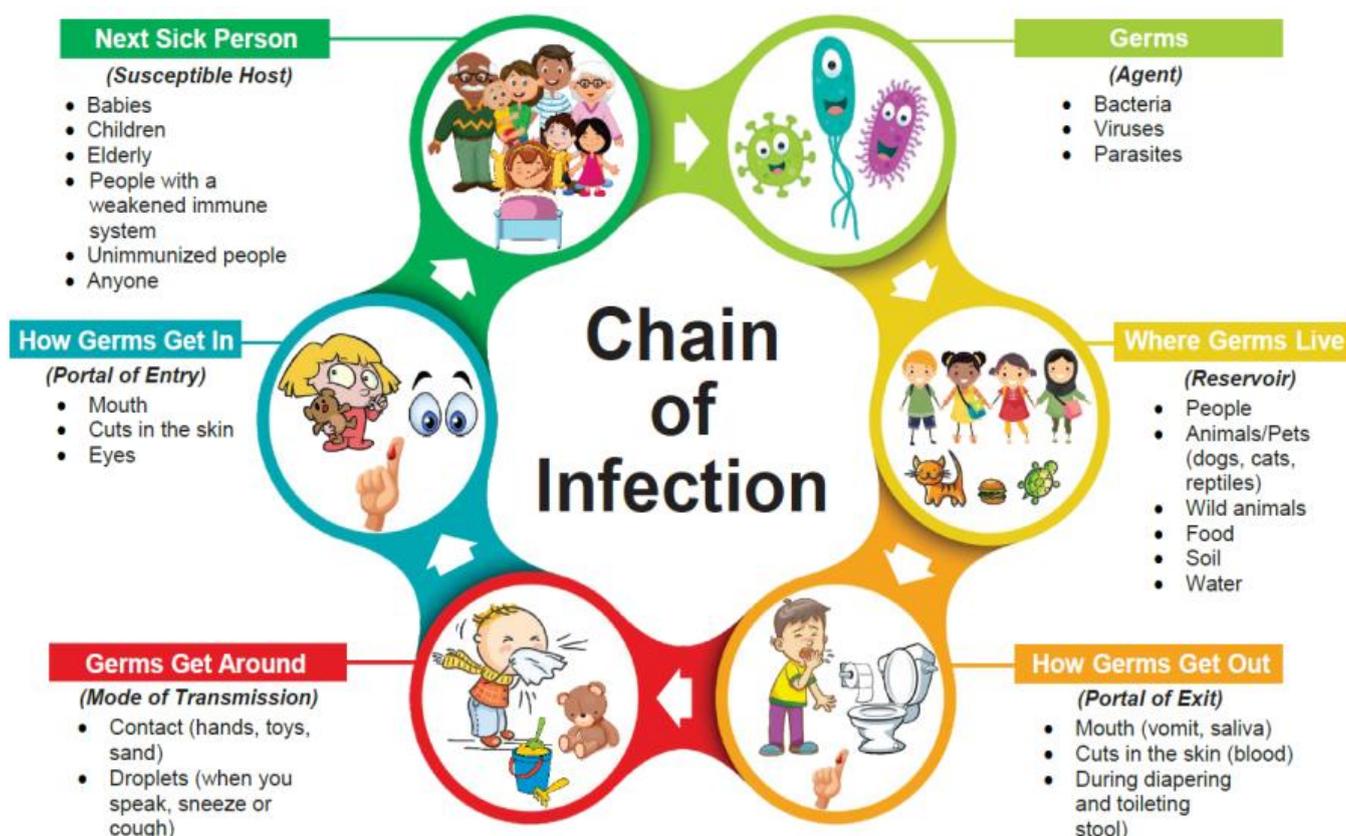
Sl.#	Purpose	Contact number
1	Public service call center	1010
2	National COVID-19 hotline	2121
3	Elderly citizens/medical refill	6060
6	Counseling interventions for those under quarantine and those who may have mental distress due to the pandemic	17123237 17123238 17123239 17123240 17123241

Important sources of information on COVID-19

1. Ministry of Health (MoH), Bhutan- <http://www.moh.gov.bt/> or <https://www.facebook.com/MoHBhutan/>
2. COVID-19 Government Portal, Bhutan- <https://www.gov.bt/covid19/>
3. Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Bhutan- <https://www.pmo.gov.bt/> or <https://www.facebook.com/PMOBhutan/>
4. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Bhutan- <https://www.mfa.gov.bt/> or <https://www.facebook.com/MoFABhutan/>
5. World Health Organization (WHO)- <https://www.who.int/>

Infection control

Chain of Infection transmission



Precautions to prevent infection

The precautions to prevent COVID-19 infection are categorized into the following:

1. Contact precautions
2. Droplet precautions

Contact precaution

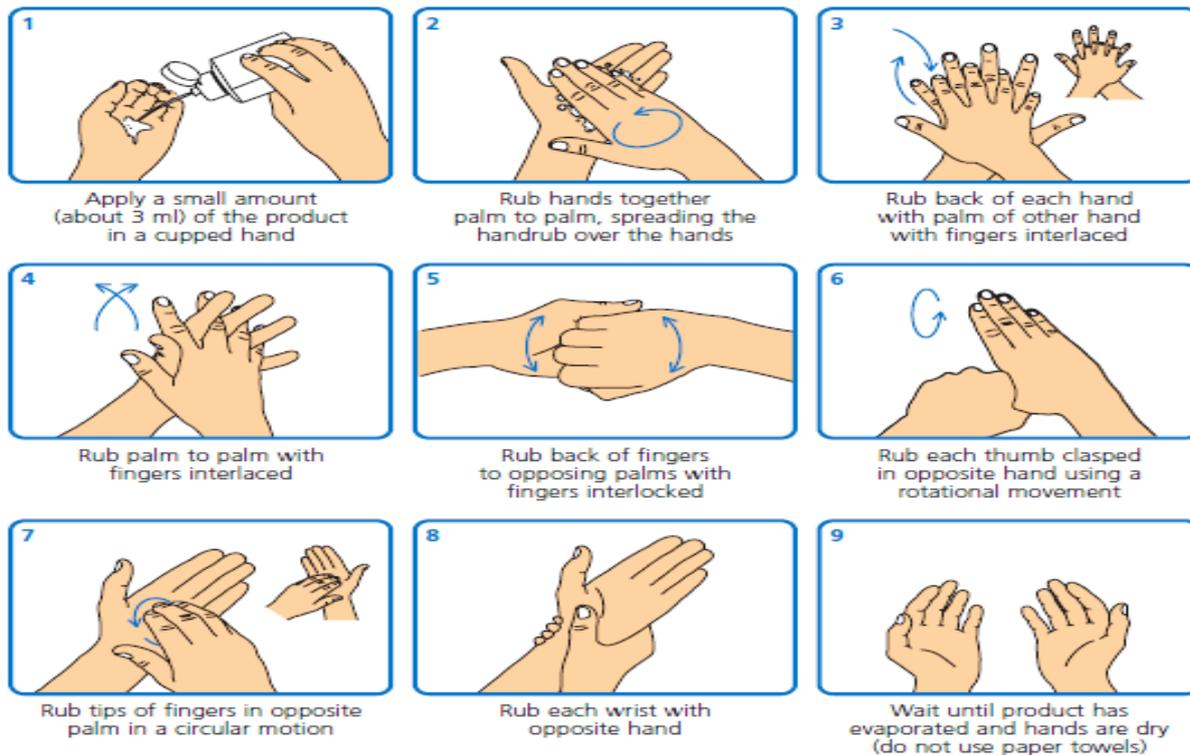
The contact precaution consists of the following:

1. Perform Hand hygiene/Washing
2. Wear mask
3. Wear gloves
4. Use a Face Shield
5. Shoe Covers May Be Necessary
6. Report Any Possible Exposure Immediately

Hand Hygiene/Hand Washing

1. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
2. use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with minimum of 60% alcohol
3. A minimum of 3 ml of hand sanitizer should be used in each session
4. Soap and water are the best option if hands are visibly dirty.
5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
6. Remove all ornaments
7. Keep nails short

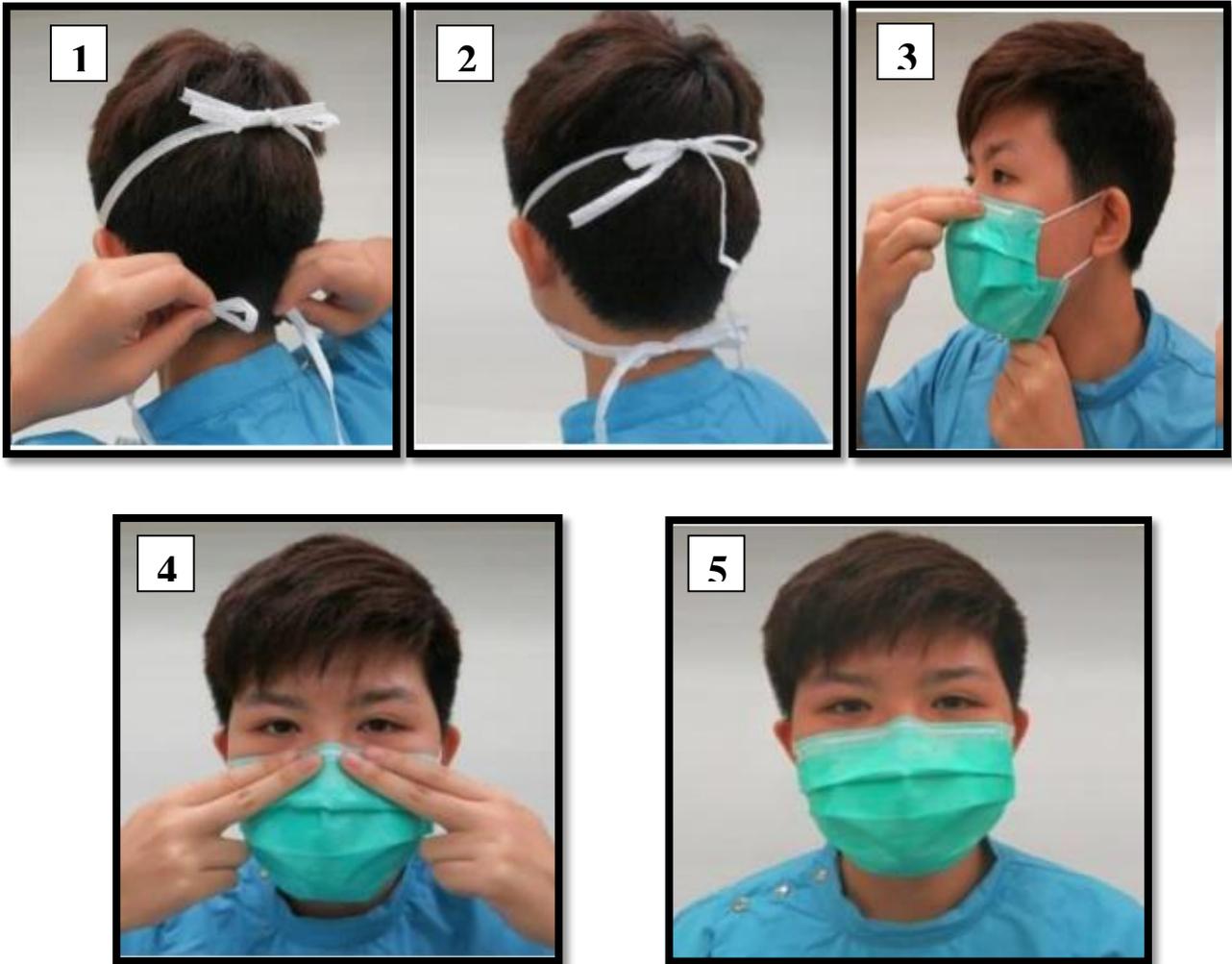
7 Steps of hand washing (Soap and water/ Sanitizer)



Basic Personal protective equipment

Steps to wear a face mask





Gloves

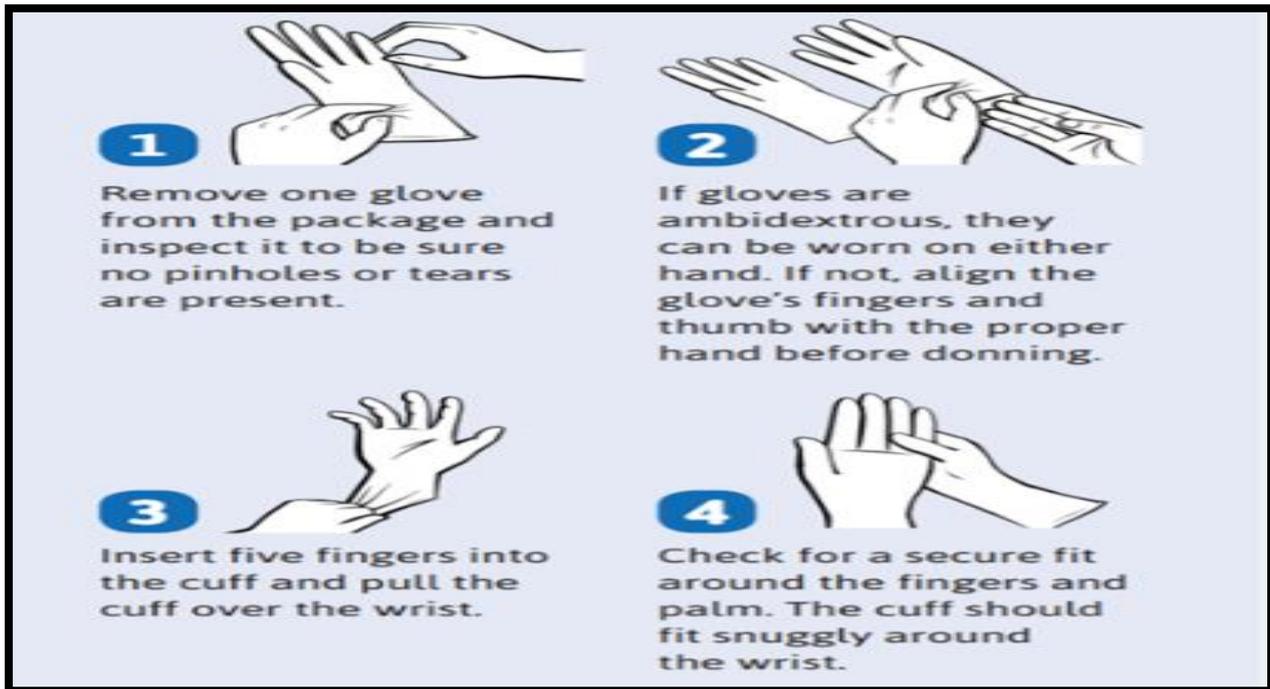
When to use gloves?

1. If you are handling infectious and contaminated waste
2. When cleaning and serving meals
3. When handling luggage

Note:

- ✓ Hand washing is very important (before and after) using gloves
- ✓ Can use hand sanitizer with gloves if they are contaminated

Wearing/ putting on the gloves



Removing the gloves



Monitoring Body Temperature and Oxygen level

What is body temperature?

- The degree of heat maintained by the body
- OR
- It is the balance between the heat produced and the heat lost in the body

Devices used to check the body temperature



Body temperature range

The body temperature may vary between 97°F to 99°F or 36.1°C to 37.2°C

Normal Body temperature		
Oral Temperature	Rectal Temperature	Axillary Temperature
98.6°F (37°C)	99.6°F (37.5°C)	97.6°F (36.4°C)

Forehead	35.8°C– 37.8°C
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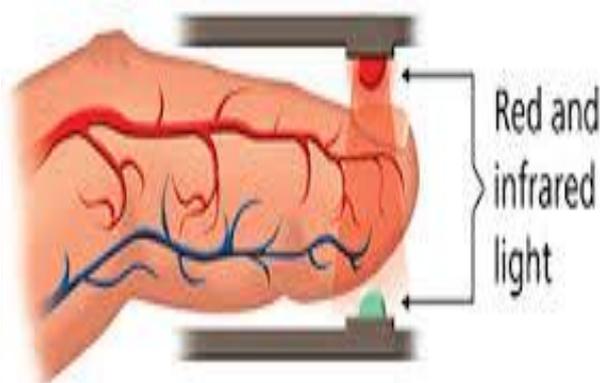
Temperature Reading



Oxygen Level

- ✓ Normal= SpO2 of 90% and more
- ✓ Hypoxemia=SpO2 below 90%

Pulse oximeter



Some relevant videos

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6x_Lfjxa3Y

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmSi5BxgTpA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWA6Gwx8fls>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHm-zSCURvY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuuUrI2qM8>

Section 2

ENTRY PROCEDURE AND OTHER PROTOCOLS



Tour booking

1. Tourists must contact a licensed Bhutanese tour operator to arrange their tour to Bhutan. The list of licensed tour operators are provided at: www.bhutan.travel/tour-operators
2. Tourists with full vaccination will have to stay in facility quarantine for 14 days while those who have not taken the vaccination (or incomplete vaccination) will observe the 21-day mandatory quarantine.
3. Tourists are requested to discuss the cancellation & refund policies with the tour operator prior to travel.

Visa application procedure for MDPR paying tourists

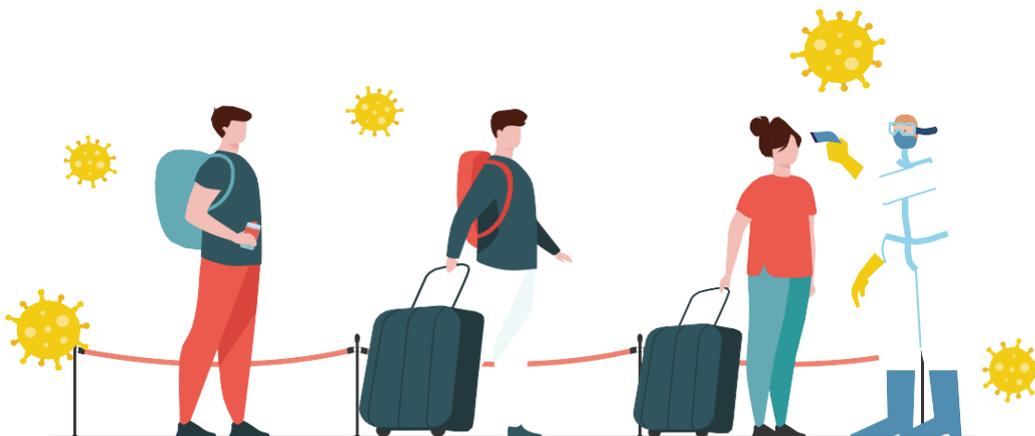
1. Bhutanese tour operators will apply for a visa on behalf of the tourist to Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB).
2. Tourists will be required to obtain an online visa before arrival.
3. Visa fee of USD 40 will be applicable.
4. The following are mandatory for processing visa:
 - a. Applications as well as extensions thereof to be channeled through Tashel Online system.
 - b. Application forms to be complete in all respects and incomplete application will be rejected.
 - c. Applications endorsed by TCB will be approved by the Department of Immigration (DoI).

However, the Bhutanese tour operators should get prior approval for the detailed travel itinerary from relevant authorities and agencies.
 - d. Fees will be collected along with tour payments.
 - e. Submission of other supporting documents specified by relevant authorities.

5. Visa will be endorsed on a case by case basis and on approval by Technical Advisory Group (TAG), Ministry of Health (MoH).
6. Tourists need to pay other fees and charges.
7. Bhutanese tour operators will process other required permits.

E-permit application procedure for non-MDPR paying tourists

1. A Bhutanese tour operator will apply for-permit on behalf of the tourist to TCB.
2. All tourists will be required to obtain an online e-permit before arrival.
3. The following are mandatory for processing e-permit
 - a. Applications as well as extensions thereof to be channeled through Tashel Online system.
 - b. Application forms to be complete in all respects and any incomplete application will be rejected.
 - c. Applications endorsed by TCB will be approved by the Department of Immigration.
 - d. Submission of other supporting documents specified by relevant authorities.
4. E-permit will be endorsed on case by case basis and on approval of TAG, MoH.
5. Tourists need to pay other fees and charges.
6. Bhutanese tour operators will process other required permits.



Airline requirement

1. Any airline operating flights to Bhutan will check tourists for valid visas and negative RT-PCR test report taken 72 hours before departure for allowing them to board the flight.
2. All flights operating to Bhutan are required to consult Aviation Authority on the health protocols that need to be adhered to.

Health authority requirements

1. A negative RT-PCR test report taken 72 hours prior to boarding the flight to Bhutan.
2. All tourists undergo a RT-PCR test between 6-7 days after arrival.
3. All tourists to undergo a RT-PCR test on completion of the quarantine.

PROCEDURE AT THE AIRPORT



Airport arrival

1. All tourists follow COVID-19 protocols at the airport.
2. All tourists/airport staff should maintain physical distance of at least 1 meter at all times.
3. All tourists to undergo temperature screening through thermal scanners and if anyone with signs and symptoms to undergo RT-PCR test.
4. Disinfecting procedures to be in place for all arrivals, luggage and travel documents.
5. All tourists follow additional requirements recommended by airport authorities.

Health/Immigration counters

1. All tourists fill in the health declaration form and submit to the health counters at the airport.
2. Immigration/Health officers will check all mandatory documents of tourists including visa, e-permit, RT-PCR report, travel/COVID-19 insurance, and other requirements.
3. For additional information refer the MoH website at www.moh.gov.bt and <https://www.gov.bt>

Common facilities used by tourists (washrooms, lobby areas, etc)

1. Make sure the safe distance of 1 meter is maintained at all times.
2. Regularly disinfect the frequently touched areas using standard and quality disinfectants.
3. Common facilities should be washed and disinfected as per the health guidelines.
4. Ensure convenient availability of hand sanitizers in the common areas of the airport.

Tourist information center

1. Have a dedicated official at the tourist information center in Paro.
2. Provide information on COVID-19 safety measures.
3. Provide reliable and clear information on online banking facilities and services.
4. Distribute relevant promotional collaterals.
5. Assist those needing help with general information.

Airport transfer and travel options

Airport transfers

Government will arrange designated escort vehicles for tourists to transfer individuals from airport to facility quarantine.



Airport transfer vehicle

1. Will have proper signage.
2. Will operate at 50% capacity.
3. Will have seats arranged and marked accordingly to ensure safe distance between the passengers.

Airport transfer officials

1. The officials should stay in the containment facilities.
2. Officials should wear the uniform provided at all times.
3. Officials should wear masks and maintain at least 1 meter at all times.
4. Officials should ensure that luggage is fully disinfected prior to handling

ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES



Facility quarantine

1. Tourists with full vaccination will have to stay in facility quarantine for 14 days while those who have not taken the vaccination (or incomplete vaccination) will observe the 21-day mandatory quarantine.
2. Tourist can either stay in normal quarantine or have the option to stay in tourist standard facility quarantine upon payment of additional costs.
3. Tourists are required to follow the latest Guidance and SOP on Quarantine facility.
4. Tourists pay for all the COVID-19 tests and other medical expenses during their stay in the facility quarantine, as per the government regulations.



USE FACE MASK



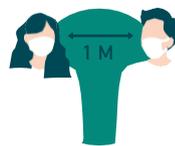
CLEAN & DISINFECT



WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY



AVOID TOUCHING EYES, NOSE OR MOUTH



KEEP DISTANCE FROM OTHERS

Post-quarantine accommodation

1. Only the hotels/accommodation certified as "Clean and Safe" would be allowed to host tourists after the mandatory quarantine and must comply with the SOP for the tourism service providers issued by TCB.
2. The list of accommodation providers certified as "Clean and Safe" will be provided in the tashel system.

Section 3

Standard Operating Procedures for Tour Operations

Introduction

This standard operating procedure (SOP) is developed to guide in tour operations in the "new normal era," when the country reopens to tourism. Although adapted from various practices implemented around the world, this document is designed to suit the Bhutanese context. The main aim of this SOP is to make the residents and visitors feel safe and comfortable while on tour. In addition, the following are the objectives of the SOP:

1. To guide and prepare tourism service providers for the new normal tourism in concurrence to health and safety protocols;
2. To implement "clean and safe" certification of tourism service providers to create safe environment for tourism activities;
3. To raise awareness and build capacity of tourism service providers in health and safety protocols to prevent transmission of COVID-19; and
4. To monitor compliance of tourism service providers with the generic guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures.

Scope

This document is intended to be used by the tourism service providers. A tourism service provider interested to host tourists during the "new normal" era must adopt this SOP as an interim measure till the Royal Government of Bhutan advises otherwise.

Generic preventive measures

These measures include simple health measures that must be followed to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. All tourism stakeholders must strictly follow these measures at all times. The measures areas follows:

- a) **Physical distancing** of at least 1 meter to be followed at all times.
- b) Mandatory use of **face masks** at all times.
- c) Practice frequent **hand washing** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizers.
- d) **Cough etiquettes** need to be followed strictly and this involves strict practice of covering one's mouth and nose while coughing/sneezing.

Clean and Safe certification

The purpose of "Clean and Safe" certification is to enable tourism establishments to demonstrate that they are safe, clean and ready to serve customers and that the employees have been trained on health and safety protocols. The certification will be a mandatory prerequisite for all tourism service providers to open their services to tourists. For tourist hotels and tourist standard restaurants, face to face training has been conducted and the physical assessment of the property conducted based on which the certification has been awarded.

Online training



Training is an important component of the "Clean and Safe" certification program. This online training on the basic health and safety measures for tour operation is developed by the Tourism Council of Bhutan and Sector Associations, endorsed by the Ministry of Health. A staff of every travel agent and all tourist guides must undergo online training session and **obtain 85%** on the test/quiz in order to be certified as "Clean and Safe".

GUIDELINES AND CHECKLISTS



Tour Operators General guidelines:

- i. The general preventive measure (physical distancing, facemasks, hand washing/sanitization and coughing etiquettes) must be followed;
- ii. Tour operators must ensure the guides and drivers are provided with a list of "do's and don'ts" and thoroughly brief them before each tour;
- iii. Tour operators must ensure guides have a list of helplines and refer suspected cases to the nearest health center/Flu clinic;
- iv. The tour operators shall employ only those tour guides who have attended the training on COVID-19 safety protocols and obtained the minimum score;
- v. Tour operators should arrange recommended basic Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and distribute them to their staff and guests, as and when required;
- vi. Tour operators should use digital technology for sharing information, tour itineraries and make digital payments in order to discourage physical contact;
- vii. Regular monitoring must be conducted by the company management and periodic monitoring shall be conducted by sector associations, TCB and relevant authorities.

Checklist

The tour operators must fulfill ALL the requirements given in the checklist below:

Area	Requirements	Remarks (Yes/No)
Office	1. The Tour operator's office must be arranged with proper physical distancing measures and equipped with temperature scanning, QR code and hand sanitizers/hand washing facilities.	
	2. Ensure there is enough basic Personal Protective Equipment (face masks, gloves, and hand gel) for employees and tourists.	
	3. Must maintain a list of emergency contact numbers and provide it to guides and drivers on tour.	
	4. Use digital technology for sharing information, tour itineraries and cashless transactions where possible.	
Tourists	1. Ensure tourists are informed on the pre-entry requirements.	
	2. Communicate and brief tourists on safety and health screening procedures as well as COVID-19 control guidelines in Bhutan.	
	3. Ensure tourists have enough basic PPE	
	4. Ensure the tourists undergo required quarantine period (unless exempted) and take mandatory COVID-19 test upon entry, during quarantine period, or before the departure as required by the destination country.	
General	1. Brief guides and drivers on "do's and don'ts."	
	2. Provide enough basic PPE to guides and drivers.	
	3. Ensure tourists and guides/drivers use Druk Trace app wherever required.	
	4. Ensure that the same designated vehicle and driver is used for airport transfers and tour programs.	

Tour Guides

Guidelines:

Guides must play a crucial role in ensuring the safety of both tourists and the public. The followings are some broad guidelines for the guides to follow:

1. Guides should ensure that COVID-19 safety protocols are being followed by the tourists during the tour operations and must ensure that guests are not taken to public places;
2. The guides must accompany the tourists at all times;
3. If a guest shows any signs or symptoms of COVID-19, they should immediately refer to flu clinic; and
4. Guides must attend necessary briefing/training on health safety protocols.
5. Guides must strictly abide by "do's and don'ts" as follows:

Do's	Don'ts
Always follow the generic preventive measures and ensure the tourists also do the same.	Don't take tourists to public places restricted by the government.
Take the tourists on tour as per the approved tour itinerary.	Don't socialize with the public or community while on duty.
Ensure the tourists stay in "clean and safe" certified accommodations only.	Don't share food from the same plate or water from the same container.
Must ensure that guests carry and use basic PPE at all times.	Don't hug, shake hands or any other body gesture which would violate physical distancing norms.
Should ensure that tourists have downloaded Druk Trace App and scan the QR codes wherever required.	Don't come to work if sick or have signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
Visit nearest flu clinic if there are any signs and symptoms of COVID-19.	
Produce COVID-19 negative test certificate and vaccination certificate to the tour operators before assuming duty.	

(The tour operator may add more provisions to the above list to make the list comprehensive)

Transportation providers (Drivers)

Guidelines:

Transportation providers come directly in contact with guests and must ensure to comply with the following guidelines and "do's and don'ts" developed as per this guideline.

1. The vehicle designated for guests should comply with COVID-19 related RSTA regulations;
2. The generic preventive measures must be strictly followed;
3. Register in Check Post Management System (CPMS) as per existing regulations;
4. The designated vehicle used for airport transfers and tour programs should be used for the same travelling group; and
5. The transportation providers must abide by the "do's and don'ts" as follows:

Do's	Don'ts
Vehicles must follow the seating capacity as per the RSTA regulations.	Don't socialize with the public or community while on duty.
Always follow the generic preventive measures.	Don't change the driver or vehicle unless in unavoidable circumstances.
Register on Check Post Management System whenever required.	Don't come to work if sick or have signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
Visit the hospital if there are signs and symptoms of COVID-19.	Don't hug, shake hands or any other body gesture which would violate physical distancing norms.
Produce COVID-19 negative test certificate and vaccination certificate to the tour operators before assuming duty.	
Drivers must keep vehicle windows open to the extent possible.	

(The tour operator may add more provisions to the above list to make the list comprehensive)

Attraction sites

Guidelines:

1. The attraction sites must be equipped with hand sanitizers/hand washing facilities and physical distancing barriers;
2. Druk Trace App should be used for all attraction centers;
3. All the visitors must be requested to follow generic preventive measures;
4. Tourist attractions and sites should have crowd management measures in place;
5. Tourist attractions and sites should strictly follow the visitor timing;
6. Tourists must be discouraged from touching “high touch areas” such as prayer wheels, railings, doorknobs, etc., and such areas must be cleaned/disinfected regularly; and
7. Periodic monitoring shall be conducted by relevant authorities, LGs, Dzongkhags and Thromdes.

Handicrafts

General guidelines:

1. Hand washing facilities/hand sanitizers must be arranged at the entrance of the shop;
2. Druk Trace app or maintain the record of visitors;
3. The shop shall be marked to ensure physical distancing;
4. Encourage customer to use digital payment;
5. The prices of all the products must be displayed on the board to minimize interactions with the customers;
6. Provide pre-packaging of products to decrease physical contact.

The handicraft shops shall be regulated like any other shops and therefore, the certification is not required. However, periodic monitoring shall be conducted by relevant authorities.

Trekking



General guidelines:

1. Trekking must be organized in the designated trek routes.
2. Trekkers must use designated campsites;
3. Guests and staff must follow generic preventive measures;
4. In case of any signs and symptoms, health helpline must be contacted for advice;
5. Guides must advise on COVID-19 safety protocols to other service providers such as horse contractors, porters, cooks, etc;
6. Guides must ensure the trekking team does not mingle with the public, communities and other trekking groups; and
7. Periodic monitoring shall be conducted by relevant authorities

Inspection and Monitoring

Monitoring of tourism service providers is important to ensure safety of both the tourists and public. While conducting monitoring, feedback from tourists as well as the service providers must be collected to improve the system. Three levels of monitoring shall be instituted so that tour operations are conducted in a clean, safe and comfortable manner:

Internal Monitoring

The management of the tourism service providers shall conduct regular monitoring, depending on the need. For instance, hotels must conduct daily monitoring of the services while the tour operators can conduct weekly monitoring of guides and drivers. A format for internal monitoring must be developed by the management and a monitoring report must be produced to the relevant authorities during periodic monitoring.

Monitoring by Sector Association

The Sector Association must play an active role in monitoring the establishments under them. This would not only help in enforcing health safety protocols but also inculcate a sense of ownership of the program and responsibility for the service providers under the association. The sector association must conduct weekly monitoring and share the report with relevant authorities.

Monitoring by relevant authorities

In addition to the internal monitoring and monitoring by sector associations, the governmental authorities shall conduct monitoring of tourism service providers and attraction sites to reinforce the seriousness of the implementation of the health safety protocols. A monitoring on a monthly basis may be conducted by TCB, LGs and other relevant authorities.

Fines and penalties

Fines and Penalties shall be levied as per the existing Tourism Rules and Regulations, Ministry of Health regulations and other national regulations.



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