

Covid19: Guidance to Aberdeenshire Council School Transport Operators – From 31 August 2020

This guidance is intended to inform operators who undertake school transport services on behalf of Aberdeenshire Council.

Operators are expected to undertake appropriate risk assessments taking due consideration of available guidance. The Council will work with school transport contractors, where appropriate, to assist in ensuring the necessary measures are put in place to mitigate identified risks.

Parents/carers and school staff also have a role to play in educating children and young people on acceptable behaviour on school and public transport. Guidance has been issued to parents/carers.

This guidance has been informed by Scottish Government guidance on school transport, which in turn reflects the scientific advice of the COVID-19 Advisory Sub Group on Education and Children's issues, published on 16 July and available at the following link <http://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advisory-sub-group-on-education-and-childrens-issues---advisory-note-on-school-transport/>

The key messages from the scientific advice and related schools guidance <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-preparing-start-new-school-term-august-2020-version-2/> include:

- **From 31 August 2020 pupils should normally wear face coverings on school transport.**
- Dedicated school transport should be regarded as an extension of the school and it is not necessary to maintain distance between children and young people of any age (subject to continued low levels of infection within Scotland).
- Important mitigations include: hygiene; ventilation; improved cleaning regimes, including regular and thorough cleaning of surfaces; and, regular handwashing. Hand sanitising should be required for everyone prior to boarding dedicated school transport. (Operators are not required to provide hand sanitiser for pupils).
- Children, young people and adults must not board dedicated school or public transport if they, or a member of their household, have symptoms of COVID-19 or they are self-isolating. If a child or young person develops symptoms while at school, they will be sent home. They must not travel on regular home-to-school transport. The school should contact the parent/carer who should make appropriate and safe arrangements to collect the child or young person.
- Where public transport (including local buses) is required for school-aged children to attend school, the general advice and guidance from the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland should be followed. This currently includes the mandatory use of face coverings unless exemptions apply and the need for physical distancing where possible.
- Drivers and staff on public transport, and to a lesser extent on school transport, are at relatively higher risk of exposure to the coronavirus and particular attention should be paid to ensuring that they are protected from airborne and surface transmission.

Operators should ensure all drivers and other staff involved in the provision of school transport services are fully aware of the guidance and their responsibilities in this regard.

The guidance covers all aspects of school transport; however, additional guidance is available regarding the carriage of pupils with additional support needs. A specific section of the guidance deals with the operation of taxis and private hire cars.

DEDICATED SCHOOL TRANSPORT

This section of the guidance applies to all dedicated school transport.

It is important to note that if a dedicated school transport vehicle is used for other purposes before and after transporting children to school, then effective implementation of the preventative measures set out below is particularly important in these circumstances.

Enhanced cleaning:

Operators should determine what supplementary arrangements are needed alongside their existing programmes for cleaning vehicles.

It is recommended that frequently touched surfaces are cleaned quickly after each journey whenever possible – this is especially important where vehicles are used for other purposes before and after transporting children to school – and that enhanced cleaning takes place at the end of each day.

In addition to preventing the spread of infection, ensuring an effective enhanced cleaning regime is in place will play an important role in building confidence among parents/carers, children and young people in school transport services.

Children and young people:

Pupils should normally wear a face covering before boarding and throughout the journey when travelling on school transport in accordance with Scottish Government guidance. There are exemptions for those with relevant health conditions or disabilities and for children aged under 5. Pupils should not be excluded from travelling if they are not wearing a face covering but if you have specific concerns about their behaviour, or a large proportion of pupils fail to comply, this should be reported to the school.

The scientific advice makes clear that maintaining distance between young people on dedicated school transport is not necessary. However, where feasible and provided they do not introduce capacity constraints, the following precautionary approaches may help further reduce risk:

- **Where possible, arrangements should be put in place to allow family groups and pupils from the same class groupings to travel together.** This will reduce unnecessary mixing and is one way to further lower risk.
- **Where possible, pupils should be assigned seats** which they use consistently, although this is not essential. This could be allocating specific seats or having rules such as sitting in ascending year groups: front to back, youngest to oldest.
- **Wherever vehicle capacity allows, distancing between individual passengers, or groups of passengers, is helpful.** In particular, for example, in cases where children travelling on the vehicle attend different schools, and for certain children with complex needs.
- **Face-to-face seating should not be used.**
- **The consumption and sharing of food and drink should not be allowed.**

It is accepted that drivers may be unable to monitor and enforce seating arrangements. **Where designated seating arrangements are possible, the Passenger Transport Unit) should be advised** of the arrangements so the relevant information can be passed to schools to advise the families and children, accordingly.

Ventilation:

Operators should keep windows or skylights open, where possible, and ensure that mechanical ventilation uses fresh rather than recirculated air; or where air conditioning is used, pay particular attention to the appropriate frequency for changes of filters.

Drivers, staff and other adults:

Particular attention should be paid to ensuring drivers, staff and other adults are protected from the risks of COVID-19 in vehicles. Under normal circumstances **drivers should, where possible, wear a face covering**.

Operator risk assessments should consider whether changes within a vehicle are required, with changes made on that basis. This may include leaving seats behind/beside the driver empty or fitting a physical barrier or screen.

Any adults travelling by dedicated school transport should conform with the prevailing Scottish Government requirements for public transport. At the time of writing the guidance requires 1 metre distancing and the wearing of face coverings.

Drivers and passenger assistants may wish to use alcohol hand rub or sanitiser at intervals throughout the journey and should always do so after performing tasks such as helping a child into the vehicle or handling a child's belongings.

If drivers of school transport services have other driving tasks as part of their job role, for example transporting others who may be vulnerable, particular attention should be paid to effective implementation of the preventative measures set out in this guidance to prevent the spread of infection.

All (children, drivers, other adults) travelling on dedicated school transport:

All passengers and **staff should wash/sanitise their hands prior to boarding dedicated school transport**. Operators are not required to provide hand sanitiser for pupils.

Schools will regularly reinforce the importance of this key message, and **parents/carers are advised that children should wash/sanitise their hands prior to boarding the vehicle in the morning**. Schools will address the need for hand washing/hand sanitising prior to boarding the school bus for the return journey.

Good respiratory hygiene will also be encouraged ("Catch it, kill it, bin it") and children will be encouraged to carry tissues on home-to-school transport.

Any discarded or lost face coverings found on the vehicle should be disposed of appropriately and should not be treated as lost property.

It is crucial that someone with symptoms or self-isolating does not enter a bus or taxi/PHC and travel. **Drivers and adult passengers must book a test if they display coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms.** Families will be advised that they must get a test for children displaying symptoms.

It is imperative that operators carry the correct children on the correct vehicles. Drivers should check pupils are boarding the correct vehicle. Also, permission must be sought from the Passenger Transport Unit should an operator wish to transfer a pupil between contracts/services.

Taxis and Private Hire Cars:

Where taxis and private hire cars are used solely for the purpose of transporting children and young people to school, as with dedicated school bus and coach services, physical distancing requirements are not necessary for pupils.

Pupils should not use the front seat(s) and should wear face coverings unless medically exempt. If an unaccompanied child travelling to school does not have a face covering the driver should provide them with

a disposable face mask and then report the matter to the school upon arrival so the school can contact the parent/carer. **Operators should carry a small supply of disposable face masks** for this purpose.

When travelling by taxi or private hire car, pupils will be advised to follow the advice of the driver, including sitting in the back-left hand seat of the car when travelling alone.

As indicated above, appropriate cleaning and sanitising measures are also necessary.

Should operators wish to fit screens within the vehicle, following a risk assessment, Licensing Authority advice should, if necessary, be sought. Aberdeenshire Council's Licencing allows the fitting of screens in taxis and PHCs, subject to the conditions set out here: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/licensing/taxi-and-private-car-licence-holders-covid-19/>

Additional Support Needs (ASN) School Transport Services:

Separate guidance is provided regarding the carriage of those pupils with additional support needs.

COMBINED SCHOOL TRANSPORT/LOCAL BUS SERVICES:

The Council will work with the operators of these services to determine the best approach, including increasing capacity, converting services to closed/dedicated school transport operation and the introduction of dedicated seating zones. Where appropriate mitigation measures are not considered feasible the service(s) will be converted into dedicated school transport services either on a temporary or permanent basis.

ADDITIONAL SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ADVICE

Guidance about the workplace and staff issues - <https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/covid-19-guidance-for-non-healthcare-settings/>.

Guidance for transport operators - <https://www.transport.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/transport-transition-plan/guidance-for-transport-operators/#>

Issue date: 26 August 2020