

## COVID-19: Planning Group around schools and settings reopening

### Primary and Secondary (mainstream) Home-to-School Transport Protocol

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This protocol sets out expectations and key guidance for transport contractors, their drivers and other staff, for school leaders, managers and staff who work in schools and educational settings, and for parents and carers of children eligible for home-to-school transport.

The protocol draws on national guidance and is aligned with DCC Public Health guidance in order that consistent practice can be applied across schools and settings in County Durham, and by the contractors who provide home-to-school transport to these.

The protocol is intended to help both contractors and schools/settings complete essential risk assessments, prior to the transportation of an increasing volume of children and young people as schools open to more learners in line with the government's direction.

Please note that national guidance is subject to change and this protocol could be affected by such changes; DCC will endeavour to update and issue revised versions of the protocol should this be necessary.

## Section 1 General Principles:

- There remains in place a general direction to parents and carers – namely that if a child has symptoms, or someone in their household does, they must not attend childcare settings, school or colleges.

In these cases, the following guidance applies: [Staying at home guidance](#)

- Sustained social distancing of 2m is impossible to achieve in most situations involving home-to-school transport. It is therefore essential that care is taken in every other respect to avoid transmission of infection:
  - Seats alongside or immediately to the rear of the driver are out of use.
  - Rear-facing seats are out of use.
  - Occupation of available seats in any form of transport will be restricted (see further details in Section 2)
  - Drivers, passenger assistants, children and young people using home-to-school transport are to wear a face covering for the duration of all journeys, (exceptions as outlined below - Section 3).

- Where possible, contractors should consider fitting a temporary plastic sheeting screen to isolate the driver from passengers
- Procedures for boarding and alighting from transport will be regulated by the driver, as detailed in this protocol (section 3)
- The driver has the authority to instruct passengers about where they should sit in order to maintain safety, and this should be respected by passengers (Section 4)
- Drivers (and other staff employed by contractors) will need to receive training so that they can respond appropriately in a range of situations outlined in this protocol.
- Where a passenger wilfully fails to comply with instructions from a driver, this will be treated as a serious matter with sanctions that could include the immediate removal of entitlement to travel.
- Vehicles will be regularly cleaned following steps outlined in this protocol to prevent the spread of infection; drivers will maintain a responsible hygiene regime as outlined in this protocol. (section 6)
- In the event that a child starts to show coronavirus symptoms during transportation, the action outline in this protocol will be followed (section 8)
- If a child is unwell at their school or setting, the expectation is that, wherever possible, they will be collected by a member of their family or household. However, where this is not possible, the protocol outlines steps that would offer a driver safe means of providing transport to take the child home. (sections 7 and 8).
- Maintaining consistency: the same driver should be used for the operation of the contract unless exceptional operational circumstances make that impossible on a given occasion.

## Section 2      Restricted occupation of available seats:

It is for contractors to determine the most appropriate seating arrangements in their vehicles that will allow the expected maximum social distancing and other safe practices to be observed, in accordance with government guidelines. The table below is provided as a theoretical model, mainly to enable school leaders to build the notion of restricted occupancy of school transport vehicles into their planning and risk assessments.

<b>Vehicle</b> <i>(typical examples only)</i>	<b>Theoretical passenger occupancy</b>	<b>Allowable seat occupancy</b>
4-seater saloon	1	1 passenger, seated rear nearside

6-seater people carrier	2 (or 3)	1 seated in middle row nearside and 1 in rear offside; or 3 from same household, 1 seated in middle row nearside and 2 in rear
8 seat minibus	2 (or 4)	2 passengers from separate households, 1 seated in middle row nearside and 1 in rear offside 4 passengers from same household, 1 seated in middle row nearside and 3 in rear.
10-seater minibus	2 (or 4)	2 passengers from separate households, 1 seated in penultimate row nearside and 1 in rear offside; or 4 from same household, 1 seated in middle row and 3 in rear
14-seater minibus	3 (or 5)	3 passengers from separate households, 1 seated in first usable nearside, then 1 per row staggered offside/nearside to rear. Or 3 in rear and 2 in penultimate row if from same household.
16-seater minibus	5 ( <i>possibly more</i> )	5 passengers from separate households, 1 seated in first usable nearside, then others 1 per row staggered offside / nearside. Capacity would be increased with various household group permutations.
Coach / bus	varied	Typically 25% seats usable, 1 passenger per row of 4, staggered nearside/offside down coach, with front row of coaches seated only on nearside to preserve separation from driver.

### Section 3 Safe boarding of vehicles and safe transit:

Face coverings: Children and young people using home-to-school transport, must wear a face covering for the duration of all journeys, in line with current government guidance about use of public transport, except for young children and those for whom doing so would create a medical risk, including anxiety. It is acknowledged that wearing face coverings will not be possible for a large proportion of pupils with special needs, not least because many would try to remove them and/or would become distressed.

Drivers and Passenger Assistants must wear face coverings, unless recognised medical conditions prevent this; in such circumstances, contractors will inform the Integrated Passenger Transport team immediately and an individual risk assessment will be undertaken.

Where face coverings are not worn by children and young people, DCC expects operators to work with schools and other settings to implement individual risk assessments for specific children and in specific circumstances.

Boarding when travelling to school: each passenger will be required by the driver to sit in the rearmost available seat unless specifically agreed otherwise due to reasons of child welfare. In a vehicle with multiple pick-ups, the passenger(s) boarding must do so one at a time, maintaining distance from the driver and other passengers, and sit where instructed to by the driver.

For children/young people using a power or manual self-propelled wheelchair, see Section 9.

Boarding at school for home journey: every effort should be made to load passengers in reverse of drop off order (ie last drop-off should board first, sitting in the rearmost available seat). If this is not observed, passengers alighting at their home drop-off will briefly contravene distancing as they pass seated passengers. This is not a high-risk situation but is avoidable with careful planning.

Alighting the vehicle: Passengers should alight in reverse order of boarding, preserving distance.

Where passengers pass the driver's seat to board or leave the vehicle, the driver should turn off the engine and alight from the vehicle (using the driver's door if available) before the passengers board. *NB: In some cases this is not practical (ie: larger bus making multiple stops and when use of offside door is a safety hazard in the highway context).*

## Section 4 Accountability:

The contractor is accountable for training drivers and other staff on the necessary actions they must take to keep themselves and others safe, in line with this guidance. This should include the safe wearing of PPE, when and if it is required: there are guidance posters and instructions available for this purpose from Public Health England.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/878677/PHE\\_11606\\_Putting\\_on\\_PPE\\_062\\_revised\\_8\\_April.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/878677/PHE_11606_Putting_on_PPE_062_revised_8_April.pdf)

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The driver has the authority to instruct passengers about where they should safely sit in accordance with this protocol. If instructions are not complied with, the matter should be immediately reported to the driver's employer and thence to the Integrated Passenger Transport team (DCC) for urgent attention. The probable sanction is likely to be the immediate removal of entitlement to travel.

## Section 5 Seatbelts:

To avoid proximity between driver and children, parents should be asked to encourage their children to put seatbelts on themselves, as far as possible. Where assistance is required (likely to be youngest children), the parent/responsible adult should be encouraged to assist when boarding at home.

When boarding at school, the school staff in the child's "bubble" may be able to assist as required. However, where applicable, the legal responsibility of drivers to ensure a seat belt is worn properly is unchanged; but normally a visual check should be sufficient.

## Section 6 Driver's responsibility for cleaning and hygiene:

Each vehicle should be carefully cleaned before and after every trip.

Regularly clean all surfaces, including:

- steering wheels, handbrake and fascia;
- door handles, inside and out; window handles/buttons;
- seats and hard surfaces around seats that have been occupied.

Normal cleaning products are sufficient for the purpose, including disinfectant wipes where available as these are quick and effective to use and can be disposed of easily.

Drivers should use tissues to catch coughs and sneezes. Used tissues should be disposed of in a bin with lid as soon as possible.

Drivers should wash hands frequently with soap and water (keeping a bottle of water and soap in the vehicle for this purpose), doing this for at least 20 seconds each time. Sanitizer gel can also be used but should be a minimum of 60% alcohol. Drivers must not leave cleaning products/sanitizer where passengers can reach them.

Drivers are required to wear a re-usable face-covering, or they may choose to wear a disposable face mask if they have access to one (either provided by their employer or by themselves). If a visor is available, it may also be worn but must not be worn while driving. Drivers should consider that face visors may distress some passengers such as younger children.

If a driver needs to come close to a passenger – for instance, to check or assist with a seatbelt – this action can usually be done safely without the need of PPE. Maintain distance wherever possible, wash hands frequently and maintain clean surfaces as described above.

However, some situations may require the use of PPE, and these are described in Section 7, below.

Drivers should ventilate their vehicle with opened windows wherever possible (but be aware of the need to avoid risk of children leaning out of windows).

**Do not** set air conditioning or ventilation systems to recirculate air.

Parents/carers and teachers should help by requiring all children and young people using home-to-school transport to wash their hands thoroughly before each journey.

Parents/carers and schools should seek to minimise the transportation of bags/equipment by ensuring children do not bring anything with them to school that they do not need.

## Section 7 PPE requirements for each vehicle:

Under normal circumstances, i.e. there is no indication that any passenger has the symptoms of Covid-19, current guidance states that there is no requirement for PPE to be worn, apart from a face covering as stated in Section 1.

DCC Public Health guidance identifies equipment that drivers and passenger assistants, where present, may need in emergencies. If a child or young person starts to display coronavirus

symptoms in a vehicle, PPE must be worn. It must also be worn when transporting a child home who has displayed symptoms while at school and no parent or carer is available to provide transport.

In either of these circumstances, PPE must be worn by the driver and Passenger Assistant, where present, if:

- a vehicle with a bulkhead is not available, or
- a strict distance of at least 2 metres cannot be maintained between the driver and the passenger and/or
- a risk assessment determines that the supervising adult is at risk of splashing to the eyes from, for example, coughing, spitting or vomiting.

The PPE required in these instances would be as follows:

- a fluid-resistant surgical face mask;
- disposable impervious gloves;
- a disposable plastic apron;
- if a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of fluids entering the eye from, for example, coughing, spitting or vomiting, then eye protection should also be worn.

For these reasons, a small supply of the PPE listed above must be available in all vehicles used to transport children from home to school and back.

It is the responsibility of the employer to provide PPE as described. In the event that a contractor is unable to source the necessary PPE, they should speak with the IPT team who may be able to provide advice.

## Section 8      What to do if a passenger displays symptoms:

If a child or young person appears unwell with symptoms on the run to school:

On arrival at school, before any passengers alight, the driver should immediately inform the appropriate school staff about the concern. The school will take responsibility for handling the situation.

If a child or young person displays symptoms while at school:

Any child, young person or other learner who starts displaying coronavirus symptoms while at their school/setting should, wherever possible, be collected by a member of their family or household.

In exceptional circumstances, where this is not possible, the school/setting needs to take responsibility for transporting them home. Where, by agreement between the contractor and the school/setting, this is undertaken by a home-to-school driver, the following steps must be taken:

- if possible a vehicle with a full height partition screen between the driver and the passenger should be used.
- A vehicle of sufficient size must be used where the driver and passenger can maintain a distance of 2 metres from each other.
- The driver must use PPE as outlined above.
- The passenger should wear a face mask if they are old enough and able to do so.

## Section 9 Additional information relating to children with specific needs

As is the case in all situations where home to school transport is provided for children with specific needs, operators would be required to continue to work with individual schools to implement risk assessments for specific children where necessary. *Note:* this may lead to specific PPE requirements for the driver and/or PA. Once completed, Risk Assessments are to be notified to IPT.

As in Section 3, consideration needs to be given to the order in which children and young people board and alight a vehicle, but some children have a particular wellbeing need to exit a vehicle promptly and this should be accommodated if it does not compromise the safety of the driver or passengers.

Many pupils with special needs prefer to sit in the same seat for each journey and, where possible, this preference should be accommodated if it does not compromise the safety of the driver or passengers.

### **Wheelchairs:**

When travelling in a power or manual self-propelled wheelchair, where able to do so, passengers will be encouraged to self-propel into the vehicle or drive their chair in. Where a manual attendant-pushed wheelchair or mobility buggy is used, the driver or passenger assistant will be responsible for getting the chair onto the transport, in accordance with their training (ie: some vehicles have wheelchair lifts).

The driver will then secure the wheelchair into place inside the vehicle as per their accessible vehicle training. This will require the driver to come into close proximity with the child, so they should aim to work from the sides and avoid close face-to-face proximity and observe a careful handwashing regime as outlined in Section 6.

The legal responsibility of drivers to ensure the chair is properly secured in the vehicle remains unchanged.

### **Passenger Assistants:**

In carrying out their role, Passenger Assistants will often need to come into close proximity with the child, so they should aim to work from the sides and avoid close face-to-face proximity. The wearing of a face covering and following careful handwashing regime are essential.

### **Additional information to be read in conjunction with other sections of this Protocol:**

**Seatbelts** - some children with special needs cannot fasten /unfasten their seatbelts without help. (see Section 5)

**Car seats** - some smaller children sit in car seats which should be kept for individual users and not shared. The same will apply for harnesses and other specialist equipment. There should be frequently cleaned according to the instructions in Section 6.