Part of
Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus

Guidance

Transport to school and other places of education: 2020 to 2021 academic year

Updated 7 February 2021

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Department for Education

Capacity on public transport remains limited given the requirements for social distancing. We expect attendance by children and young people when travel to school and other places of education is safe. We are working with local authorities to ensure demand management solutions for public services, and supplement the public bus network with dedicated school transport services where necessary. We expect that children can travel to school safely, and stagger the start of arrangements as the public network is minimised.

Part A provides guidance for local authorities on managing the capacity of and demand for public transport, and increasing capacity of both public and dedicated home to school transport services, where necessary, so that children can travel safely to and from school or college.

Part B provides guidance about the provision of dedicated home to school or college transport. Subsidised or commercial transport planning for school and college students must be kept up. The precise pressures on the local transport network for both home to school and other journeys, and how they may vary by time and by area, will need to reflect local circumstances this year.

Main changes to this guidance

The changes made to this guidance have been described in the change note.

Part A: managing capacity and demand on public transport

The full application of part A of this guidance may not be required during national lockdown while the majority of children and young people are learning remotely.

The application of social distancing measures to public transport has caused a significant reduction in effective capacity, which provides a challenge to routinely transporting children and students to schools and colleges.

This section of the guidance sets out what local authorities need to do so that they can increase capacity and manage demand, so that children and young people can travel safely.

You should read this guidance with:

- Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer transport guidance for operators

How local authorities can manage capacity and demand

The Department for Transport wrote to local authorities at the beginning of July 2020 to request that they: review their local bus services in preparation for the autumn colleague return; review their supplier daily ridership levels; local authorities should be encouraged and assisted by colleagues to survey parents, carers and students to collect travel intentions.

Local authorities should work with local transport operators to assess the overall level of current and forecast demand compared to expected capacity, particularly on routes to schools and colleges. Local authorities should then take action as necessary to see if more bus services can be supported when necessary, and to manage demand management and capacity interventions outlined below, taking into account the needs of all passengers.

Using Travel Demand Management

Local authorities should have developed a Travel Demand Management (TDM) delivery bundle, which was sent to local authorities on 24 July 2020. Local authorities using or adopting TDM will also be:

- understand the nature of demand for travel in local transport provision
- identify the necessary changes to how that provision is delivered
- develop necessary travel advice and communications for parents and students
- ensure that the necessary changes are implemented

Authority transport, in the form of complementary support and funding, has been made available to those local authorities in England, outside London, on completion of the TDM self-assessment provided in early July 2020.

Managing demand on home to school

Schools and colleges should encourage parents, staff and pupils to walk or cycle to school where it is safe and practicable to do so.

At a national level every bus journeys (2 miles or less which are currently undertaken by car, for example, could be made by bicycle or scooter to reduce congestion and improve the health of the nation. Local authorities should:

- building on existing schemes (such as the Walk to School programme and Bikeability training)
- encouraging schools and colleges to communicate directly with the pupils whose parents/students they know are in receipt of free school meals, encouraging them to do so
- implementing 'school streets' to create safer routes to schools

Local authorities have been allocated funding for walking and cycling which should be prioritised on those routes most frequently used by children and young people.

Car use

While it is strongly advised that parents, staff and pupils walk and cycle as an alternative to public transport, to further reduce the demand on public transport and free up capacity for those who need it, local authorities should accept that there can sometimes be a need for car use.

Local authorities must give active consideration to the impacts of increased car use on local congestion and ensure that mitigations to manage these impacts are implemented through their network management duty. Notwithstanding the above, local authorities should be aware that the Clean Air Day campaign is being run on 19th September this year and is focused on physical activity before 10AM at the school gate.

Engaging universities with local businesses and employers to reduce other demand for public transport during peak school travel times

The TDM policy bundle and support provided by the Department for Transport helps local authorities to work with local transport operators and develop plans with businesses and employers.

Staggering school and college start and finish times

We have asked local authorities to work with schools and colleges to consider whether changing or staggering school start and finish times would reduce pressure on transport services. This has the potential, in some areas, to:

- spread demand for school and college travel over a longer period
- make more effective use of existing capacity to school and college
- increase capacity the ability of public transport to support additional school and college journeys

Staggered start and finish times should not reduce the amount of overall teaching time.

Contracting additional coaches or other appropriate vehicles (where they are available at a commercial rate) and encouraging car sharing for dedicated school services

Schools will be in need for additional transport capacity the after all the above measures have been implemented. Local authorities should contract additional services.

DfE has made additional funding available for local transport authorities to provide dedicated school transport services. Local authorities should consider how they can ensure that the award of service providers reflects the level of attendance at educational establishments in order to ensure continued value for money.

Local authorities must charge pupils and students a fare for using the additional services they provide. Local authorities should set a fare that covers the cost of the service. Fares should be the same as the equivalent fare on normal public transport. Local authorities are not expected to subsidise spaces by the social distancing guidelines for passengers who are able to travel on other services. However, fare revenue should utilise such a place within wider passenger transport provision.

Read part B of this guidance for more information about the measures that will apply on dedicated school transport services.

Identifying enabling bus services and encouraging or predominantly by school children and designating them as school only services

Local authorities may wish to work with transport operators to explore temporarily designating some bus services as school only services. Local authorities should work with local authorities and transport operators to ensure that these changes do not affect the availability of funding to operate these services. Local authorities should also consider how they can ensure that the public can still use these services, and services remain available for members of the public who would normally use these services if this option is explored.

Part B: guidance for dedicated transport to schools and other places of education for the 2020 to 2021 academic year

Dedicated transport to schools and other places of education often carries the same risks as other public transport services, particularly if it is used by children from different public or those journeys. This risks limit the number of other people with which they come into contact.

Local authorities need to keep these responsibilities for the provision of dedicated transport to school and other places of education under review in the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

It applies to all dedicated transport to schools and other places of education, whether on the public network or procured by the local authority, schools or parent groups. It includes services provided by local authorities, schools, academies, colleges and other places of education, including mainstream and special schools, colleges and alternative provision settings. This includes transport:

- commissioned or provided by local authorities, whether or not the service is provided by a school
- commissioned or provided by a home or other place of education
- provided by transport operators (commercial coach routes) that are used by members of the public which it is carrying children to school or other places of education

Vehicles that provide transport to members of the public at the times are considered to be providing dedicated transport when they are exclusively carrying children and young people travelling to school and other places of education.

Most dedicated transport is organised by local authorities. However, this guidance also applies to:

- schools and other places of education, where they commission transport for children and young people
- transport operators, where they provide transport directly to children and young people commissioned by the school or local authority

In this guidance, the term 'home to school transport' includes dedicated transport to other places of education such as further education colleges.

The Department for Education (DfE) has published Public Health England (PHE) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 'all schools and colleges' guidance on 'protecting pupils and staff in schools'.

Where something is essential for public health reasons, as advised by PHE, we have used 'must'.

Key points

Local authorities remain under a statutory duty to ensure they home to school transport for children who are eligible under the Education Act 1996 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and should continue to make arrangements for those eligible pupils to travel safely to school and other places of education.

Travel restricted in the provision of home to school transport must do all that it reasonably can to minimise the risk of transmitting where possible minimise the risk of transmission. What is practicable is likely to vary according to local circumstances.

Local authorities, working with schools, places of education and transport operators as necessary, should:

- identify the risks arising from coronavirus (COVID-19)
- ensure that they are aware of the current public health guidance
- adapt measures in a way that addresses the risks, taking into account the local circumstances, and enables children and young people to attend their school or place of education

Local authorities are not required to uniformly apply the social distancing guidelines for passengers who are able to travel on other services. However, they should take into account of a place within wider passenger provision.

It is of vital importance to work through the steps set out in this guidance. In particular, to:

- social distancing should be maintained within vehicles wherever it is possible between individuals or 'bubbles'
- ensure that there is adequate ventilation of fresh air (from outside the vehicle) on dedicated school and college transport services, including using windows and ceiling vents

It is the law that children and young people aged 11 and over must wear a face covering on public transport. PHE advises that children and young people aged 11 and over must wear a face covering on school and college transport services, unless they are exempt or cannot reasonably be expected to do so. Please refer to coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers.

We believe this is an appropriate balance, because:

- the overall risk to children and young people of serious illness as a result of contracting coronavirus is low
- they do not mix with the general public on these journeys
- home to school transport often carries the same group of children and young people on a regular basis, and so is a lower risk environment in school or college
- the predictability of home to school transport will allow for planning so that protective measures can be put in place

The system of controls: protective measures

Local authorities, working with schools, places of education and transport operators as necessary, should ensure that they have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that they have created a controlled environment that minimises the risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). Children and young people should not necessarily have temperature taken. This is not a reliable method for identifying coronavirus (COVID-19).

If a child or young person develops symptoms whilst at school or their place of education, they will need to wait home. They must not travel on home to school transport. Public Health England (PHE) and local authorities will work out the most appropriate arrangements for the child or young person's journey home.

In exceptional circumstances, where it is not possible for the parent or carer to make arrangements for the child or young person's journey home, transport may be provided. Local authorities should ensure that the child or young person's school and care settings are aware of what has been done. Other children and young people who have travelled in the same home as the child with symptoms.

Drivers and passenger assistants must not attend if they have symptoms, or if someone in their household has symptoms. If they develop symptoms while at work they must go home and get tested.

Anyone with symptoms must follow Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

Children, young people, drivers and passenger assistants who have been in contact with someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19) in their household or bubble should not be expected to travel to school or other places of education.

- they develop symptoms themselves (in which case, they should arrange a test)
- the symptomatic person subsequently tests negative (in which case they can return to anyone who sees their infection is either, as advised by PHE guidance (see 2.)
- the symptomatic person tests positive for coronavirus

2. if they have been required to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace

People must wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and running water or use hand sanitiser after contact with contaminated surfaces.

If a person with symptoms has been in a vehicle that provides home to school transport, the vehicle must be cleaned before next reasonable disinfectant is to be used, after passing the infection on to other people. For more information, see COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings guidance.

2. Clean hands thoroughly more often than usual

Ensure that children and young people can wash hands is an aim. This can be done with soap and running water or hand sanitiser.

Children, young people, drivers and passenger assistants must clean their hands before leaving transport and again on disembarking.

Drivers and passenger assistants should also ensure that hands are washed or sanitised before and after handling any items such as the performing tickets and so helps to contain the vehicle in the school or other place of education.

3. Ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach

The 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach is very important. Schools will be reinforcing this approach with children. Drivers and passenger assistants should be encouraged to follow it in their communication with families.

Children should be encouraged to carry tissues on home to school transport. They will need to be encouraged to dispose of used tissues in bins on the vehicle. Local authorities should ensure that a suitable disposal process or service is in place for the safe disposal or disposing of face coverings. For more information, see 2. Personal contact and cleaning.

4. Enhance enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, and ensure that there is good ventilation of the vehicle

COVID-19 is likely to survive on surfaces for a limited period of time. Therefore, routine cleaning and disinfection will reduce the risk of transmission. For more information on keeping public transport operators safe, see Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer transport guidance for operators.

Local authorities should work with transport operators to agree the arrangements by cleaning vehicles. Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected using wherever possible, and enhanced cleaning should take place at the end of each day.

5. Maintaining contact and mixing

The guidance for schools recommends that they should minimise contact and mixing by maintaining groups or 'bubbles'. Keeping these groups or 'bubbles' separate is a key control measure to determine how they will do so in detail. In secondary schools, participating in large year 8 and 9, groups may be the size of a year group. At primary school, and in key stages 1 and 2, it is more practicable to keep to smaller groups. Secondary and primary schools are usually organised to have groups that mix as little as possible. For more information, read guidance on minimising contact and mixing in special schools.

Systems for groups of further education environments that they reduce contacts between individuals by forming groups or cohorts of students that remain separate from other groups. Colleges will be able to use their existing systems for managing attendance, that implementing bubbles seem partially will bring benefits, and will need to focus on how they can minimise contact between groups, in certain circumstances, including on transport. Colleges may also need to adapt their transport.

Local authorities should work with schools and transport operators to ensure that children mixing might be minimised on school transport. However, we know that various measures, such as the use of face coverings, may be more practicable than others and these will often be limited to the extent to which mixing can be minimised.

Wherever possible, it is recommended that:

- children and young people from different schools do not travel at the same time as 2. children and young people from different schools
- children where all with the same 'bubble' or cohort travel together, with the same consist group of children each day
- the same transport provider provides work with schools to put in place arrangements for organised parking and boarding

We acknowledge that distancing and grouping may sometimes not be possible. Where it is not possible, other measures in the system of controls become important.

Local authorities, working with schools, places of education, transport operators, and parents as necessary, need to think through the practicalities of how to put in place appropriate packages of measures for their circumstances.

- distancing between individuals/passengers or groups of passengers, should be applied wherever possible. distancing is particularly important where children attending school or other places of education are not in a bubble or cohort, for example, those that are continuing to travel on public services.
- working with schools (place of education and transport operators to consider how to minimise the number of children who are in contact with each other
- working with schools, places of education and transport operators to take an seating arrangements so that children and young people unrelated where they are not in a bubble or cohort are not sitting next to each other, for example, on a bus, for example, from the same household or bubble
- ensuring that children and young people aged 11 and over wear face coverings, unless they are exempt or cannot reasonably be expected to do so
- ensuring that children and young people are reminded of the importance of 'hands, face, space'
- ensuring good ventilation of fresh air wherever possible by keeping windows and lights, on home to school transport, open
- ensuring that there is a clear and reasonable queuing or other arrangements needed for picking up and dropping off children and young people, that will also maintain distancing when waiting for. Queuing and alighting from transport should be managed in a way that does not increase risk to others. Local arrangements needed for picking up and dropping off children and young people at their home destination

Face coverings in accordance with the law mean that children and young people aged 11 and over must wear a face covering when boarding on dedicated transport to school services. Children and young people aged 11 and over should be encouraged to wear a face covering on other transport services.

It is reasonable to assume that staff and students will now have access to face coverings due to their increasing use in society. Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers sets out how to make a proper face covering.

Face coverings:

- may be particularly useful where measures such as distancing and sitting in bubbles or cohorts are difficult to maintain
- may help children to feel more confident about using home to school transport, parents to feel more confident about their child using home to school transport
- may be particularly helpful in the case of older students, for example, in further education, young children who are SEND/LDD or ill-health conditions increase the risk of transmission
- are not a substitute for other protective measures such as good hand hygiene

Ensure that any additional risk associated with their use are identified, for example, where children and young people who are SEND/LDD may be unable to wear face coverings. Children under 11 may wear a face covering if they are able to handle it as directed. For more information, read how to wear a face covering.

Some children and young people may need to be encouraged to wear face coverings, in order to overcome any.

Schools should have a process for children and young people to remove face coverings when they arrive at school. This should enable them to wash their hands immediately on arrival. Schools should also have a process for children and young people to dispose of face coverings. Face coverings should be disposed of in a manner that does not cause a hygiene risk. Schools and colleges should keep reusable face coverings in a bag or other suitable receptacle.

Operators should provide a risk assessment for all their operations including home to school transport, and to be informed by the views of the parents and school.

Service schools tend to be smaller, meaning all the children in a year might be in the same bubble. Also, special schools will typically use smaller vehicles. Both these things will help to minimise the number of contacts children and SEND/LDD have on transport.

Some vehicles carry children to a number of different special schools. Some children and young people with SEND will not be able to use face coverings or other measures such as these, maintaining distance on transport is particularly desirable.

We recognise that transporting children and young people with SEND may necessitate some close contact. Some children may be distressed by wearing a face covering, and other disorders or physical disorders may make it difficult for them to wear a face covering for extended periods of time.

Some children and young people may need to be able to be held, or sit on their laps, to communicate. There are companies now making de-sealing friendly face coverings.

Although drivers and passenger assistants will not normally require personal protective equipment (PPE) on home to school transport (see below), where the use a risk or assessment indicates that it is required, then it should be used in line with the PPE that should continue as usual.

Staggered starts: Local authorities and schools may wish to consider staggered starts and finishes to the school day to reduce the number of people who need to travel at the same time to enable more journeys to take place. Staggered starts and finishes may be helpful where local authorities fulfil their duty to provide free transport for children who are eligible to travel to school. Local authorities should also consider how staggered starts and finishes will be used using public transport and other services.

We recognise that it is likely that children and young people in different groups or bubbles will need to travel together on home to school transport. It may not be possible for them to arrive at different times from one another. Schools, places of education and transport operators should work together to ensure that children and young people do not have to travel in disadvantaged groups (such, disadvantaged over another.

Where there is a viable waiting room, schools may need to consider having buses drop children off at a much way from the school, and children walking the last distance.

8. Personal protective equipment (PPE) is not normally needed on home to school transport

By PPE, we mean equipment such as fluid-resistant surgical face masks, disposable gloves, disposable aprons, eye protection (visor or goggles). PPE is not needed on home to school transport, aprons, aprons or gloves, and in most other settings. PPE may be helpful where local authorities fulfil their duty to provide free transport for children who are eligible to travel to school. Local authorities should consider transport, so that those children who are SEND/LDD and/or medical conditions.

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Drivers and passenger assistants will not normally require PPE on home to school transport, even if they are not able to maintain a distance from the children and young people on the transport. This is because, as set out above, children and young people with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) must not board home to school transport.

If the care a child or young person usually receives on home to school transport requires the use of PPE, that should continue. For more information, read:

- How should I care for children who regularly spit or require physical contact?
- Guidance on the specific steps that should be taken to care for children with complex medical needs, such as tracheostomies (this includes aerosol generating procedures)

Response to any infection

7. Engage with the test and trace process

Local authorities must ensure they understand the NHS Test and Trace process and how to contact their local Public Health England health protection team.

They should expect drivers and passenger assistants to book a test if they display coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms and expect families to get a test if children are displaying symptoms.

They should ensure that drivers, passenger assistants and families, on behalf of children, understand that they will need to be ready and willing:

- to provide details of anyone they have been in close contact with if they test positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) or if asked by NHS Test and Trace
- to self-isolate if they have been in close contact with someone who tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), or if anyone in their household develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)

8. Manage confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19)

Swift action must be taken when someone tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19). Local authorities should contact local health protection teams. Local health protection teams will identify people who have been in close contact with a person who tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) and tell them what they need to do. Further information is available on the NHS website.

A contact is a person who has been close to someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) with a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test or a Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test.

A close contact includes:

- anyone who lives in the same household as someone with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms or who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19)
- anyone who has had any of the following types of contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) with a PCR or LFD test:
  - face-to-face contact including being coughed on or having a face-to-face conversation within one metre
  - been within one metre for one minute or longer without face-to-face contact
  - sexual contacts
  - been within 2 metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (either as a one-off contact, or added up together over one day)
  - travelled in the same vehicle or a plane

Where a child or young person tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) while at their place of education, they need to be sent home. The setting should contact the parent or carer who should make arrangements for the child or young person to journey home as soon as possible. They may walk or cycle if it is possible for them to do so and they are able to wear a face covering and keep a safe distance from others. They must not travel on public transport or in a taxi or private hire vehicle. Exceptionally the local authority may be able to help source a suitable vehicle which would provide appropriate protection.

Other considerations

Meeting the home to school transport duty in alternative ways

Section 508B of the Education Act 1996 permits local authorities to meet their duty to provide free home to school transport to an eligible child in alternative ways, provided they have the parent's consent. The duty on local authorities for those over 16 is different, but the practices detailed in this section should be considered good practice for that age group as well.

We know that, to maximise home to school transport capacity, some local authorities have asked parents to accept personal travel budgets or mileage allowances to take their child to their school or place of education. This is permissible with the parent's consent.

Local authorities should not expect parents to commit to accepting a personal payment or mileage allowance for a specified period of time, particularly in the current economic climate. For example, a parent may feel able to take their child to their school or place of education while they are furloughed, but subsequently their circumstances may change. However, parents should understand that the local authority will need reasonable notice to put in place home to school transport for their child or young person.

Mileage allowances and personal budgets should cover the cost of the parent's journey to school with their child in the morning, and home again afterwards, and their journey to collect their child in the afternoon, and home again afterwards.

Where a child normally travels on dedicated home to school transport, local authorities should not provide a personal travel budget if that would mean the child then needs to travel on public transport.

Where a child or young person needs a passenger assistant on home to school transport, a local authority may ask their parent to travel with them in place of a passenger assistant. The parent's consent is required for this arrangement to meet the local authority's statutory duty. The parents should not have a role in supervising any other children in the vehicle.

Local authorities should be mindful of their duties under the Equality Act 2010 when asking parents to accept alternative offers.

Workforce

Implementing the measures in this guidance will reduce the risk to all staff.

Drivers and passenger assistants should maintain a distance from their passengers wherever possible. We acknowledge that the nature of school transport, and the needs of the children and young people receiving it, mean this will not always be possible. Drivers may be able to leave the vehicle to maintain distance while children and young people are getting on and off.

Some drivers and passenger assistants may feel concerned about going to work. Local authorities (or the driver or passenger assistant's employer, where this is not the local authority) should discuss their concerns and explain the safeguarding measures that are in place to reduce risk on home to school transport.

Guidance for the clinically extremely vulnerable is available.

Communication with families, schools and transport operators

Communication is key to make sure everyone involved understands the instructions they need to comply with and can feel confident that risks are being considered and controlled in the most effective way.

Local authorities should consider how to communicate the home to school transport arrangements clearly to children, young people, parents, schools and transport operators. Schools and places of education will also have an important role in communicating with families, children and young people.

Things to consider:

- encouraging parents and children to walk or cycle where possible
- parents will need to understand that their child or young person must not travel if they or anyone in their household has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- children, young people and their families will need to understand any arrangements for queuing for and getting on home to school transport, and where they should sit in the vehicle
- children, young people and their families will need to understand who is required to wear face coverings on home to school transport
- drivers and passenger assistants will need to understand any rules that they, children and young people need to follow on home to school transport
- local authorities, schools, places of education and transport operators will need a shared understanding of the arrangements for children and young people's arrival at school or place of education in the morning and collection in the afternoon
- drivers should not be expected to police arrangements such as seating plans, queues, the wearing of face coverings or use of hand sanitiser - their role is to focus on driving the vehicle safely
- some parents, children, young people, drivers and passenger assistants may feel concerned about the risk of infection on home to school transport and may want to be reassured about the safeguards that are in place

Behaviour

We do not expect drivers to police pupil behaviour. Their role is to focus on driving the vehicle safely.

The home to school travel and transport statutory guidance sets out our expectation that schools should promote appropriate standards of behaviour by pupils on their journey to and from school.

Schools may wish to consider updating their behaviour policies with any new rules and policies. This may include rules relating to behaviour on the way to and from school. It also includesthe consequences for poor behaviour and deliberately breaking the rules and how they will enforce those rules, including any sanctions.

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