Dear Parent

September 2020 Home to School Transport Arrangements for SEND pupils

The situation regarding the provision of home to school transport this autumn has been fluid for several weeks and Staffordshire County Council is working to re-activate all its home to school transport for entitled pupils from September 2020.

The Government has decided that all schools will re-open in September 2020 and all pupils will return to school. They have now issued advice about how this will be achieved, and the Council is following this guidance as it re-activates the school transport network.

To keep everyone as safe as possible, we will rely on the cooperation of operators, staff, parents, pupils and schools. Only by all of us working together will we keep everyone safe to prevent and protect from infection.

Many of you may now feel uncertain or anxious about returning to things that you used to do before, such as going to school.

This Parent Guide provides information to support your child with their return to school on home to school transport.

**Will social distancing be maintained on home to school transport?**

* The Social distancing [guidance to passengers on public transport](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers) will **not** apply on dedicated home to school transport from the autumn term.
* Government guidance suggests this is appropriate because:
  + the overall risk to children and young people from coronavirus (COVID-19) is very low.
  + They do not mix with the general public on those journeys.
  + Home to school transport often carries the same group of children and young people on a regular basis, and those children may also be together in school.
  + The predictability, which public transport does not afford, will allow for planning so that protective measures can be put in places.

**Will my child travel in their classroom bubble or segment?**

* There is no requirement for children to sit with the group of children (social bubble/segment) with which they are educated on school transport.
* Guidance provided to schools acknowledges that implementing bubbles will still bring benefits evenif implemented partially, and that schools may need to allow mixing into wider groups in certain circumstances including on transport.
* Special schools tend to be smaller, meaning all the children in a school 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 with SEND have on school transport.
* Ensuring the same children always sit together will help to minimise the number of contacts each child has. Such arrangements will require clear communication between schools and families/children.
* Ensuring the same driver, passenger assistant and vehicle are used on transport will help to minimise the number of contacts each child has.

Due to the consistency and continuity many SEND pupils require this is a requirement in the contract we have with operators. It’s important to note that this cannot always be guaranteed due to staff holidays, sickness or vehicle breakdowns or repairs.

* Allowing space between passengers, or groups of passengers, is nevertheless helpful where possible, but we know that transport capacity means that there are many circumstances in which this will not be feasible. Where it is not possible, other control measures become more important such as the use of face coverings, enhanced cleaning regimes and hand washing.
* Drivers will not be expected to police arrangements such as seating plans, queues or the wearing of face covering – their role is to focus on driving the vehicle safely.
* Information will be provided on potential seating arrangements so that children and young people understand where they need to sit on home to school transport. This could be allocating specific seats or having rules such as sitting in ascending year groups: front to back, youngest to oldest.

**What advice can I give my child about general hygiene on transport**

* Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an easy virus to kill when it is on skin. This can be done with soap and running water or hand sanitiser.
* Children, young people, drivers and passenger assistants should clean their hands, before boarding home to school transport and when arriving at school or home.
* It should not normally be necessary for children or young people to clean their hands during the journey.
* Parents can assist to help keep everyone safe by ensuring their child follows good respiratory hygiene by promoting the ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ approach, Schools will be reinforcing this message with children.
* Children should be encouraged to carry tissues on home to school transport.

**Should my child carry hand sanitiser?**

* It should not normally be necessary for children or young people to clean their hands during the journey.
* For pupils who can use hand sanitiser safely and providing they do not share with other pupils they may wish to use it at intervals throughout the journey.

**Will hand sanitiser be available on the vehicle?**

* 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.

**Will my child need to wear a face covering on home to school transport?**

* It is now the law that people age 11 and over must wear a face covering on public transport. This law does not apply to school transport. However Public Health Guidance **recommends** that people aged 11 and over wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated school transport from the start of the autumn term.
* This does not apply to those who are exempt from wearing a face covering on public transport. A face covering is a covering of any type which covers your nose and mouth (see exemptions below).
* Children under 11 **may** wear face coverings if they are able to handle them as directed.
* Some children and young people with SEND will not be able to use a face covering properly and should not be expected to do so as this may increase the risk of transmission.
* Some children may be distressed by wearing a face covering, or by others wearing them. Others may become distressed if they and other people do not wear them.
* Face coverings are not a substitute for other protective measures such as good hand hygiene.

**How do I know if my child is exempt from wearing a face covering?**

* Face coverings should not be worn by those who may not be able to handle them as directed (for example, young children, or those with special educational needs or disabilities) as it may inadvertently increase the risk of transmission.
* Some children and young people may need to be able to lip-read, or see people’s faces, in order to communicate.
* Some children and young people with special educational needs may be distressed if the people around them wear face coverings.

**What is classed as a face covering?**

* A face covering is a covering of any type which covers your nose and mouth. Reusable or single-use face coverings are available for parents and carers to buy. A scarf, bandana, religious garment or hand-made cloth covering may also be used but these must securely fit round the side of the face.

**Do face coverings have any benefits for my child?**

* Face coverings may be particularly useful where measures such as distancing and sitting in bubbles or year groups are not possible.
* Face coverings may help children to feel more confident about using home to school transport, and parents to feel more confident about their child using home to school transport.

**Will the driver and passenger assistant have to wear a mask or face covering?**

* 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 children and young people with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) must not board home to school transport, they should stay at home and get a test.
* Some children and young people may need to be able to lip read, or see people’s faces, to communicate. There are companies now making lip-reading friendly face coverings.
* It’s important to note that operators will have been tasked to produce a risk assessment for their staff as face coverings offer some benefits in work situations where [social distancing](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators#social-distancing) is difficult to manage. For example, when working in passenger facing roles including when aiding passengers with disabilities it may be necessary for passenger assistants to use ‘Type 1’ face masks.
* Public health advice is that staff wear a face covering when they are unable to maintain social distancing in passenger facing roles, recognising that there will be exceptional circumstances when a staff member cannot wear a face covering, or when their task makes it sensible (based on a risk assessment) for them not to wear a face covering.

**My child is anxious around people who wear face coverings, is there anything you can do to help?**

* If drivers, passenger assistants or pupils are required to wear face protection consideration can be given to face visors being worn instead.
* This will allow for their faces to be clearly seen, this may help children feel less anxious.
* Where appropriate, find opportunities before school starts to show children that other people, including family members, wear face coverings.

**My child would like to use a face covering, how can they be used safely?**

* Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on, and after removing it
* Avoid touching your face or face covering, as you could contaminate them with germs from your hands – this is particularly important
* Change your face covering if it becomes damp or if you’ve touched it
* Continue to wash your hands regularly
* Change and wash your face covering daily
* If the material is washable, wash in line with manufacturer’s instructions – if it’s not washable, dispose of it safely

**What arrangements are in place to ensure vehicles are kept clean?**

* Operators have introduced enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces using standard products, such as detergents and bleach.
* Staffordshire County Council has provided financial support for operators to enable enhanced cleaning regimes.
* Asking transport operators to keep windows on home to school transport open, where possible, to increase ventilation; or use air conditioning which must be set to fresh air, not recirculate.

## **What arrangements will be offered to care for children who regularly spit or require physical contact?**

* We recognise that transporting children and young people with SEND may require close contact. Where this is the case, other measures in the system of controls should be put in place to reduce risk. For example, staff may want to wash or sanitise their hands more frequently.
* If non-symptomatic children present behaviours which may increase the risk of droplet transmission (such as biting, licking, kissing or spitting) or require care that cannot be provided without close hands-on contact, they should continue to receive care in the same way, including any existing routine use of PPE.
* The issues will be specific to each child or young person and individual responses will be required. School risk assessments should be made available to transport staff.
* In these circumstances, to reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission, no additional PPE is necessary because these are non-symptomatic children in a non-healthcare setting and so the risk of viral transmission is very low. However, additional space and frequent cleaning of surfaces, objects and toys will be required. Cleaning arrangements should be increased in all settings, with a specific focus on surfaces which are touched a lot.

**How are my bus company/taxi operator protecting their own staff?**

* All contractors are required to prepare their own risk assessments and submit them for approval by Staffordshire County Council.
* Drivers and passenger assistants must not work if they have symptoms, or if someone in their household has symptoms. They must go home if they begin displaying symptoms whilst at work.
* Shielding measures have been relaxed from 1 August, but those who are clinically extremely vulnerable will be advised to maintain strict social distancing.
* Advice for those who are [clinically-vulnerable, including pregnant women](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing#clinically-vulnerable-people), is available. Advice for those who are extremely clinically vulnerable can be found in the [guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19).
* Some drivers and passenger assistants who are not clinically extremely vulnerable may nevertheless feel concerned about returning to work because they are at comparatively increased risk from COVID-19. These Individuals may also wish to contact their GP to discuss their return to work.

**Will my child be able to access home to school transport if they have symptoms of Covid-19?**

* Parents must be advised that children or young people must not board home to school transport if they or a member of their household has [symptoms](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works#people-who-develop-symptoms-of-coronavirus) of coronavirus (COVID-19). Children and young people should not routinely have their 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 educational institution, they will be sent home. They must not travel on home to school transport.

**What will happen if an infection occurs on school transport?**

* All parties will be expected to contact your local Public Health England health protection team to enable you to engage with the test and trace process.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>

* Drivers and passenger assistants will be expected to book a test if they display coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms and we expect families to get a test for children displaying symptoms.
* All parties will need to provide details of anyone they have been in close contact with if they were to test positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) or if asked by NHS Test & Trace.
* All parties will need to [self-isolate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection) if they have been in close contact with someone who develops coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms or someone who tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

**My child is classed as extremely vulnerable to infection is transport safe?**

* Since 1 August, government have advised that all children who are clinically extremely vulnerable should attend school.
* The government could reintroduce shielding if the situation changes and there is an increase in the transmission of COVID-19 in the community.
* Guidance has been published on extremely vulnerable persons:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19

**I would like to take my own child to school until I feel secure, will they lose their seat on school transport?**

* This offer of Covid-19 safe school transport is made by the local authority to parents/pupils, but if parents/pupils do not wish to accept the offer, they can make their own alternative arrangements for transport to and from school.
* A parent may feel able to take their child to their school or place of education in September because they are furloughed, but subsequently their circumstances may change.
* A pupil will not lose their seat on transport, but 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.
* For further information on alternative methods of school travel please follow the link below:

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Schooltransport/Active-school-travel/September-2020-Back-to-School-Active-School-Travel.aspx>

**Everything is changing so quickly where can I keep up to date with developments?**

Government Guidance & Support on Coronavirus:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Home to School Transport:

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Schooltransport/Under-16s/Home-to-school-transport-Autumn-2020.aspx>