



COVID-19 SCHOOL TRANSPORT GUIDANCE SEPTEMBER 2020

updated 21 August 2020

Wiltshire Council

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT FROM SEPTEMBER 2020

Wiltshire Council has continued to provide home to school transport throughout the lockdown period and more recently for those year groups which have returned to school.

Following on from the issue of the **Government's guidance** for full opening of schools and FE establishments on the 2nd July, it is worth summarising the implications on how students will attend establishments on both transport provided by Wiltshire Council and the general use of public transport. Further, specific guidance on transport to educational establishments has now been made available whereby Wiltshire Council is able to provide a much fuller set of guidance to educational establishments, parents and transport providers.

As the guidance states, resumption of transport for the return of all pupils in September will require a partnership approach between local authorities, schools, trusts, dioceses and others. In particular, it is imperative that schools work closely with local authorities that have statutory responsibility for 'home to school transport' for many children, as well as a vital role in working with local transport providers to ensure sufficient bus service provision. DfE will shortly publish new guidance to local authorities on providing dedicated school transport, based on the framework outlined here.

Given the pressures on public transport services it may also be necessary to work with local authorities so that they can identify where it might be necessary to provide additional dedicated school transport services, including in places where these services do not currently operate.

However, we must be clear that we are very constricted in the options which we can offer. Many of our school buses are contracted onto other work before or after any particular school run. This might be a primary school run after a secondary school run or a bus which then has public service commitments. By utilising vehicles and drivers in this way we achieve the best use of limited resources and best value for the public purse.

Students travelling on dedicated school/college transport organised by Wiltshire Council

- From September there will be no requirement for social distancing to be in place on dedicated home to school transport, as:
 - the overall risk to children from coronavirus (COVID-19) is low,
 - they do not come into contact with the general public on home to school transport




- home to school transport often carries the same group of children on a regular basis, and those children may also be together in school.
- It will not be realistically possible to provide transport in year-group bubbles, as this is geographically prohibitive. Segregation of children by age on school buses is also likely to be difficult to enforce, at least initially, but in practice often occurs organically with the youngest age groups occupying the front, through to older students to the rear
- Where schools and colleges are considering changing their opening and closing times, they should be aware that many buses are often scheduled to perform more than one journey in the morning and the afternoon. It is therefore likely that most school buses will need to continue operating at the times they did, pre-coronavirus.
- Although government guidance suggests that schools and colleges may wish to consider staggered opening and closing times, we will only be able to provide transport once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Therefore, if schools and colleges wish to operate staggered opening and closing times they will need to make provision themselves for students once they arrive on site and also at the end of the day.
- Local authorities remain under a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport for all eligible children
- Wiltshire Council will complete all relevant risk assessments for home to school transport and, where necessary, ensure that transport providers do the same
- Whilst social distancing is not required on dedicated school buses, school and college transport will be operated, as best it can, on the basis of the same "systems of control" that educational establishments are required to work to
- In line with Government advice it is strongly recommended that secondary age pupils wear a face covering on dedicated school buses due to distancing and sitting in "bubbles" or year groups not being possible.

Students travelling on public transport

In line with the reduced risk level, the Government has relaxed social distancing measures across a wide range of sectors and worked with individual sectors to apply the new measures to that particular industry. The public transport sector has consulted with government and The Confederation of Passenger Transport UK (CPT) that this change in social distancing on board public transport is allowed and is necessary to help get the country moving again.





The current requirement is that all passengers on public transport should wear a face covering and be at least “1-metre plus” (where “plus” is a mitigating factor, in this case a face covering) from another passenger which means one person can now sit on each double seat, in a zig-zag formation down the bus. Face-to-face seats cannot be used, and the front row should be left empty to provide a clear area around the driver (who will also be behind a screen).

Because of this, Wiltshire Council along with all local authorities nationally, are considering how best to deliver transport for those pupils who use public transport considering some were previously full at peak times and very few spare vehicles and drivers are likely to be available. This means we have a responsibility to consider how all students using public transport can be transported and not just those who are eligible under the council’s scheme. Therefore, there will be a need for council staff to work closely with your representatives over the summer months.

This will likely affect smaller pockets of our educational community, but mainly secondary schools and FE establishments where students use public buses to get to their place of education.

Cycling and walking

We recognise that some parents will be reluctant to allow their children to travel on school transport, whether dedicated or public.

If all of these parents choose to drive their children to school there will be a significant and serious increase in congestion and pollution, especially in roads around schools. This will have a negative effect on those pupils who walk or cycle to school.

As a rural county making the whole trip to and from school may not be possible by foot or bicycle, but we would ask that you promote considerate use of the car where parents choose this method of transport. One good way to reduce congestion and pollution around school is to promote a Walk & Stride scheme where children are dropped off a mile or so from school and walk the final part of the journey. Not only is this good exercise ahead of the day’s studies, it can also be a great social time if they are dropped off near friends houses and they walk together.

Communication with pupils/parents

As you will appreciate the Covid-19 situation is constantly developing and advice is being updated and revised in line with the latest discoveries and trends. This applies as much to transport as it does to the education setting, so things may change before September.

We would therefore appreciate your assistance in communicating transport messages to pupils, especially those not using free transport or on our Post-16 scheme who are therefore unknown to us.

We will be providing a set of Frequently asked questions on the Council’s web-site which will be amended and expanding as and when required. These may be helpful in answering questions from parents and are provided below.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Home to school transport

Students travelling on dedicated school/college transport

● What is “dedicated” school/college transport?

By this, we mean services which exclusively carry children travelling to school/ college. This includes:

- services commissioned or provided by local authorities, whether or not the service is provided free of charge
- services commissioned or provided by schools or other educational establishments
- services provided by transport operators (commercial travel routes) which cannot be boarded by members of the public at the same time as they are carrying children to school or other place of education.

● Does social distancing apply?

Social distancing guidance to passengers on dedicated home to school transport does not apply. The Government believes this 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.
- this predictability, which public transport does not afford, will allow for planning so that protective measures can be put in places.

● Does my son / daughter need to sit in the same seat each day?

No, there is no requirement to do so, but this should be encouraged wherever possible as it minimises the

number of potential contacts. Some seats, especially at the front of the vehicle may be marked as being out of use; passengers should not sit in any seats marked in this way and follow instructions from the driver regarding where to sit.

● Do drivers and passenger assistants need personal protective equipment (PPE)?

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 on the transport. This is because children on home to school transport will not have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Where the care a child ordinarily receives on home to school transport necessitates the use of PPE, that will continue as usual.

● Will my son / daughter be expected to wear a face covering?

In line with Government advice, it is strongly recommended that secondary age pupils wear a face covering on dedicated school buses due to distancing and sitting in “bubbles” or year groups not being possible. If pupils do wear face coverings, they need to be removed in the appropriate manner. Schools and places of education should have a process for children and young people to remove face coverings which enables them to wash their hands immediately on arrival (as is the case for all pupils), dispose of temporary face coverings in a covered bin or place reusable face coverings in a plastic bag they can take home with them, and then wash their hands again. It will not be a condition of travel but pupils should be encouraged to do so, unless they fall into one of the **exemption categories**.

The Government has not recommended the use of face coverings by primary school age pupils.

- **Will the vehicles be cleaned each day?**

Yes, and in line with Government guidelines, we additionally require frequently touched surfaces such as hand rails, bell pushes and seatbelts to be cleaned during the day.

- **Will the vehicle be cleaned between runs?**

Public Health England recommend that frequently touched surfaces are cleaned quickly after each journey wherever possible, but it is not mandatory and will not always be practicable to do so.

- **If the school staggers its opening/closing time will I receive transport at a different time?**

No, there will only be one trip into school in the morning and one return home in the afternoon, so normal school transport times will be in place.

- **Will the transport be the normal operator (buses and coaches) – driver/PA (taxi)?**

Transport will be provided by your normal operator (buses and coaches), but we cannot guarantee you will get your normal driver/PA (taxi) as they may be self-isolating themselves or looking after someone who is.

- **What do I need to do prior to my child travelling (i.e. ensure they have washed their hands and discourage them from touching their face)?**

Children should wash their hands for 20 seconds before leaving home (as they would for any activity away from home) and, if possible, sanitise their hands before boarding school transport.

Similarly, if possible, children should sanitise their hands once they have left the bus, and in any case should wash their hands thoroughly when they re-enter their homes.

It is good practise for children not to touch their faces, to cough and sneeze

into a tissue or their elbow and should be encouraged at all times, including on school transport.

Routine testing of an individual's temperature is not a reliable method for identifying coronavirus.

- **If my son/daughter falls ill at school will they be able to return home on school transport?**

No, it is the parent's responsibility to ensure their son / daughter is picked up from school should they fall ill during the school day.

- **What will happen if a driver or passenger has a suspected case of Coronavirus?**

If a driver or passenger suspects that they have Coronavirus they must follow the rules to self-isolate with other members of their household and order a test to find out if you have coronavirus in line with **Government policy**.

- **What will happen if a driver or passenger has a confirmed case of Coronavirus?**

If a driver or passenger tests positive for Coronavirus, they must share information promptly about their recent contacts through the NHS test and trace service to help alert other people who may need to self-isolate in line with **Government policy**. For this reason, it is essential that passengers travel on their allocated service and not one which makes a similar journey.

- **Can my son/daughter eat or drink on board school transport?**

In line with our standard behaviour policy, eating and drinking on board is not permitted. It is especially important that this rule is followed at the present time when it is necessary to reducing facial contact. It also prevents litter on board; drivers and cleaners have more important tasks cleaning to concentrate on.

- **Will spare seats still be available to non-entitled passengers?**

Yes, we will still be selling spare seats. However, as some seats will not be in use on vehicles to help provide a clear area around the driver we will be operating with a reduced capacity, which will reduce our ability to provide spare seats. There may also be a delay in releasing spare seats this year, to both existing passengers and new applicants, as we establish what spare capacity there is.

- **If a child coughs on my child on purpose, will that child be removed from Transport?**

What happens if children are 'fake coughing' on others because they think it is funny?

Our standard Code of Conduct for children using school transport continues to apply, specifically:

- Treat the driver and other passengers with respect
- Anti-social behaviour will not be tolerated, and any right to free transport from the council may be withdrawn.

If transport provision is withdrawn it would then become the parent/guardian's responsibility to get the child to school at their own expense.

- **How will my child get to school if I don't want them to travel on a coach/bus or in a taxi with other students – do I have other options?**

Can I claim a petrol payment if I chose to transport my child myself?

If you choose not to send your child to school on the transport arranged by Wiltshire Council, you will have to make your own arrangements. However, it is important that you follow Government guidelines and do not gather at the school gates. It is also important that space is provided for walking and

cycling pupils to safely enter and exit the school and use the surrounding pavements and roads with regard to road safety and social distancing.

- **I am unhappy with the transport provision on offer, as I do not believe it is safe, how can I escalate this?**

If you are unhappy about a decision which has been made regarding transport for your child, you can pursue your concerns further. You should submit, in writing, the circumstances to be considered to the education transport entitlement manager. Email to educationtransport@wiltshire.gov.uk

Students travelling on public transport

- **What is a "public transport" service?**

Some students are issued with passes which enable them to travel on public buses or a train service to get to and from their place of education. A public transport service is one which is open to any member of the public.

Many students travelling to "out of catchment" schools and to colleges travel by a public transport service. Although these students are not entitled to free transport provided by Wiltshire Council the Government has asked us to consider providing additional capacity to allow students to travel separately to other members of the public. In this case the transport will be considered to be a "dedicated" school transport service as described above.

In some cases, school transport is provided using a bus which spends the rest of its day providing a public service, but which is restricted to carrying only school pupils at the start and end of the school day. This is a dedicated school service, as described above.

● **Does social distancing apply on public transport services?**

You should maintain a 2-metre distance where possible, because the risk of transmission is small at this distance.

However, if you cannot keep a 2-metre distance, reduce the risk to yourself and others by maintaining a 1 metre distance where possible, and taking suitable precautions, including wearing a face covering.

On buses this generally means sitting one person to a double seat, alternating between window and aisle positions on each row of seats. Seats facing each other (as sometimes found at the rear of double deck buses), in the wheelchair/buggy space and immediately behind the driver should not be used. Many bus companies are using signs on seats or windows indicating where passengers shouldn't sit.

● **Do passengers on public transport need to wear a face covering?**

Yes, passengers must wear a face covering on public transport unless one of the following exemptions applies

- Breathing difficulties and other respiratory conditions.
- Conditions effecting their dexterity, meaning they are not able to put on a face covering.
- Mental health conditions such as anxiety or panic disorders.
- Other non-visible disabilities such as autism.
- Cognitive impairments, including dementia, who may not understand or remember the need to wear a face covering.
- Visual impairments, with a restricted field of vision, particularly if any residual vision is at the lower edge of the normal field of view.
- Impairments which would make it difficult to put on or take off a face covering safely, accurately, consistently or without pain.

- Under the age of 11 or on dedicated home to school transport.

● **Do public transport drivers need to wear a face covering?**

There is no requirement for bus drivers to wear face coverings whilst in their cab as they are behind a protective screen. However, once they leave the cab, for example to operate the wheelchair ramp, they should wear a mask.

● **Will the vehicles be cleaned each day?**

Yes, and in line with Government guidelines frequently touched surfaces such as hand rails and bell pushes should also be cleaned during the day.

● **If I normally pay a fare to travel to school or college can I still use cash?**

Yes, but bus companies are strongly encouraging the use of multi-journey or season tickets to reduce the amount of cash being handled. Many bus companies now also offer Contactless card payments. Please contact your bus company to find out about the options they offer.

● **Will the transport be provided by the normal operator?**

Transport will be provided by your normal operator, although timetables may be different.

Some public transport services are extremely busy at the start and end of the school/college day. Members of the public are being asked to continue to work from home, or to avoid travelling at peak times to allow students as much space as possible. However, Wiltshire Council is trying to arrange additional capacity to help social distancing on the very busiest journeys. In some cases, the extra bus might be from another operator or it might be from your usual operator just painted in the colours they use in a different area. These extra buses may show a different number.

- **What do I need to do prior to my child travelling (i.e. ensure they have washed their hands and discourage them from touching their face)?**

Children should wash their hands for 20 seconds before leaving home (as they would for any activity away from home) and, if possible, sanitise their hands before boarding school transport.

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- **How will my child get to school if I don't want them to travel on a bus or train with members of the public - do I have other options? Can I claim a petrol payment if I chose to transport my child myself?**

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