

COVID-19: Parental Guidance on Aberdeenshire Council School Transport

15 March 2021

The Council continues to follow Scottish Government guidance on school transport.

This guidance has been informed by Scottish Government guidance on school transport dated 8 March 2021, which is available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-schools-reopening/pages/reducing-risks-implementation-and-enhanced-mitigations/> and which in turn reflects the scientific advice of the COVID-19 Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children's Issues, published on 3 March 2021 and available at the following link <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advisory-sub-group-on-education-and-childrens-issues---phased-return-to-in-person-learning-in-schools-and-elc-settings---next-steps/>

With the further phased return of pupils from 22 February 2021, the main change from former guidance is that 2m physical distancing of secondary pupils on school transport vehicles is now no longer advocated.

Maintaining appropriate distancing is recommended for secondary pupils and that arrangements should be made wherever possible for each pupil to sit on their own. For example, using staggered "zig-zag" style seating, with secondary pupils permitted to sit alternately in window/aisle seats in each row of the vehicle or, on services where there are banks of three seats, leaving one seat empty between pupils. Pupils from the same family are permitted to sit next to each other.

Appropriate distancing is a requirement on all buses and coaches and in taxis and private hire cars where physical distancing should be maximised, with for example the pupil sitting behind and diagonally opposite the taxi/private hire driver, in a situation where only one pupil travels. It is acknowledged that this may not always be possible and secondary pupils from two different households may now travel together in a taxi/private hire car leaving a seat between pupils (one at each window seat and a space between them) or using staggered "zig-zag" style seating arrangements in larger vehicles, alongside other mitigations.

There are no physical distancing requirements between primary pupils.

For all pupils there should be 1m physical distancing from any adult travelling on the vehicle unless mitigating measures are in place, e.g., there is a screen between the driver and passenger(s). In the case of pupils with Additional Support Needs the pupil's individual needs must take priority.

What school transport looks like

- Vehicles will be subject to enhanced cleaning, especially frequently touched surfaces.
- Windows or skylights will be left open when possible to improve air circulation.
- Drivers will usually wear a face covering.
- At some pick-up locations, pupils may be required to stand back when the vehicle arrives to allow the driver to exit the vehicle and open the passenger door.
- Front seats will not be used, to enable pupils to distance from the driver, in taxis, private hire cars and some minibuses.
- Pupils may be assigned their own seat which they should always use, or they may be directed to a designated seating area to sit nearest to pupils of a similar age or year group. Siblings may also be asked to sit together.
- All pupils travelling on school transport must wear a face covering unless medically exempt or aged under 5. Failure to do so may result in your child being refused travel. In the case of pupils with additional support needs there is a presumption that they will be unable to wear a face covering.

- On Additional Support Needs school transport any Personal Assistants will ordinarily wear a face covering or PPE.

Steps that parents or carers can take to help

- Do not allow your child(ren) to travel if they or a member of your household have symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have been asked to self-isolate. If your child(ren) display symptoms you should arrange for a test.
- Ensure your child(ren) sanitise their hands, either with soap and water or sanitiser, prior to boarding the vehicle to go to school. Note that transport operators are not expected to provide hand sanitiser. Pupils may carry sanitiser on the bus if they wish but should be careful not to spill it on the vehicle floor as this could cause a slip hazard.
- Encourage your child(ren) to follow the “Catch it, kill it, bin it” health advice by carrying tissues and disposing of these responsibly.
- Advise your child(ren) that they must not consume or share food or drink on school transport.
- Remind your child(ren) that they should look after their belongings carefully and not leave anything behind on the bus. Any face coverings found on the vehicle will be destroyed.
- Make sure that your child(ren) is/are wearing a face covering before boarding the vehicle unless they are exempt. Advise them that a face covering must be worn for the entire journey to/from school.
- If your child is exempt from wearing a face covering, you may wish to provide them with proof such as the printable card available from Disability Equality Scotland <https://disabilityequality.scot/face-covering/>.
- **Remind your child(ren) that they should follow any seating instructions and if they are secondary pupils, they should practice appropriate physical distancing on any school transport vehicle.**

If you have any concerns about your child’s school transport, please contact the Passenger Transport Unit on school.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or tel. 01467 533 335.

Updated 10/03/2021