

School Transport Protocol (Mainstream settings)

June 2020

Introduction

This protocol sets out expectations and key guidance for parents/carers, their children and for transport contractors and their staff.

The protocol tries to reflect Welsh Government guidance. It can be applied across schools and settings in the county and be used contractors who provide school transport.

Please note that this protocol could be affected by changes to national guidance.

Parents and Learners

It is the parents' responsibility:

- (a) To ensure learners do not travel if anyone in the household is symptomatic, in which case the learner(s) shall stay isolated for the prescribed 14 days
- (b) To acknowledge a zero-tolerance for poor behaviour on transport (to include circumstances where a learner fails to follow instructions given).
- (c) To ensure learners wash their hands (or for younger learners that parents do that for them) or use appropriate-strength sanitiser thoroughly before leaving their home or school to board their vehicle.
- (d) To remind learners to board and alight transport single file, maintaining a 2m distance at all times, while waiting and queuing.
- (e) To remind learners they must ensure they follow any instructions given by their driver or school staff.
- (f) To remind learners that they will be allocated a specific seat on the vehicle and that learners must remain in that seat for their entire journey, to ensure everyone can meet distancing requirements. Seating plans will be based on the boarding/alighting point of each learner. There may need to be different arrangements for those travelling on local bus services.
- (g) To remember that the School Travel Code and behaviour framework will continue in operation and any learner that misbehaves, risks or causes damage or injury to the vehicle, driver or passengers or in any way threatens the health & safety of other passengers or vehicle will be subject to an immediate ban from Flintshire County Council's Integrated Transport Unit for the learners involved.

Distancing on School Transport

The following seats are out of use:

- Seats alongside the driver
- Those immediately behind the driver (unless there is an appropriate & approved screen fitted)
- Those facing the rear.

Loadings shall generally and typically be on the basis of the following, based upon a 2m distancing requirement or as close thereto as possible. Please note that this is a guide only, as internal layouts and vehicle lengths will differ:

Usual passenger seating capacity	Indicative Maximum occupancy	Commentary
4 seat car	1 passenger only	To sit behind the passenger seat (diagonally seated away from the driver)
5-7 seat Hackney (purpose built)	1 passenger only	Assuming there is a locked screen in place which is cleaned on the passenger side before each journey. Can load up to the number of forward facing seats behind the screen if from same household
6-7 seat people carrier	1 passenger only	Provided using rear-most (third) row of seats on the nearside only of vehicle. For learners from the same household, this can load to the maximum number of rear (third) row of forward facing seats
8 seat minibus	1 passenger only	Provided using rear most row of seats on the nearside only of vehicle. For learners from the same household, can load to the maximum number of forward facing rear seats
12-16 seat minibus	2 passengers only	To be loaded from the rear most seat, in a sensible fashion, with no more than one occupant per row zigzagged, to a maximum of two (unless learners are from the same household in which case neither the row alongside the driver nor the first row behind the driver shall be used)
28 seat midibus	Usually 6 passengers	Dependent upon internal layout. One occupant per row zigzagged, starting from the rear of the vehicle, excluding the front row and where fitted tip-up seats
32 seat midibus	Usually 7 Passengers	Dependent upon internal layout. One occupant per row zigzagged, starting from the rear of the vehicle, excluding the front row and where fitted tip-up seats
37 seat saloon	7-10 passengers	Dependent upon internal layout. One occupant per row zigzagged, starting from the rear of the vehicle, excluding the front row and where fitted tip-up seats
53-55 seat saloon	9-13 passengers	Dependent upon internal layout. One occupant per row zigzagged excluding the front row and depending upon height of seat
57 seat saloon	9-13 passengers	Dependent upon internal layout. One occupant per row zigzagged excluding the front row and depending upon height of seat
70 seat saloon	9-13 passengers	Dependent upon internal layout. One occupant per row zigzagged excluding the front row and depending upon height of seat
Double deck buses	13-20 passengers	Typically, 10 in saloon area and 7 on upper deck but depending upon internal layout

The WHO states that the recommended distance on public transport is 1m. The principle adopted here, however, shall be adherence as near as practicable to 2m standard, when possible. Given the seat spacing on buses/coaches, this may be relaxed to approx. to 1.8m or thereabouts. High backed coach seating may relax this distance marginally further. As each vehicle is different, the contractor will provide a named seating plan for learners identified to travel on each contract each day. To comply with the requirements of the GDPR, contractors and drivers shall keep this information securely when not in use.

Seat occupancy on larger vehicles will usually be one occupant per row, with occupants staggered in a zig-zag fashion alternately nearside and offside. Occupants from the same household may, however, sit together, provided the prescribed distance is maintained between them and other occupants, including the driver.

The use of face coverings is not currently mandatory on public transport but is recommended. Parents may choose to provide their children with an appropriate covering, preferably one with three layers. The use of coverings will not result in any increase in occupancy rates without further guidance from the Welsh Government. There are exceptions where coverings are not recommended: (a) for young children, (b) for those for whom doing so would create a medical risk, including distress, and (c) in some situations where a learner has additional learning needs.

Drivers similarly may wear face coverings if they or their employer feel this is of benefit and where this is individually assessed.

Where drivers have to assist in the buckling of seat belts for small children or in loading wheelchairs then face coverings alongside the frequent application of hand sanitiser and or use of appropriate gloves may be considered appropriate if instructed by their employing contractor through a risk assessment.

Staying as Safe as Possible

Learners should take the following precautions:

- Try to keep a 2m distance from people outside of your own household and avoid physical contact with others
- Face away from other people when waiting for and using transport
- Try to minimise the number of surfaces they touch
- Wash or clean hands with appropriate sanitiser for the prescribed time before boarding transport
- Immediately upon finishing your journey, washing or sanitise hands again as soon as possible.
- Ensure that if a child is symptomatic that they do not use transport or attend school
- If your child develops symptoms at school, you will need to make arrangements for your child to be collected
- Ensure your child is aware that transport arrangements will be different to that previously provided.
- Ensure your child follows all instructions from drivers and staff, sits and remains in an allocated seat for the duration of the journey
- Have a contingency in place should the transport not arrive (e.g. if a driver is unwell at short notice)

Expectations for Learners

Learners will board calmly and one at a time, without pushing, maintaining a distance of at least 2m from other passengers.

On public health grounds, there shall be a zero-tolerance policy regarding behaviour, seating and distancing on learner transport, including at stops, at education locations and the boarding and alighting of passengers.

Children who do not comply with the new requirements will have their transport withdrawn with immediate effect.

Learners shall comply with the requirements and instruction of school/college staff when on site.

Parents will need to discuss with their children a contingency should a learner at a bus stop not be picked up by the driver (e.g. if the driver has become ill and as a consequence the transport is aborted last minute) or the child's name is not on the list.

If you have not received confirmation specifically about your child's transport, your child will not be allocated a seat and will be unable to travel. The driver is under instruction to take only those learners on the list. This is for public health reasons. Please do not allow your child to go out for the vehicle. If you do and if your child is left on the roadside, you will need to ensure your child knows what to do and you should discuss this with your child.

Where any member of a household displays covid-19 symptoms, parents shall ensure that their children do not use learner transport for a period of 14 days. Where the driver picks up at the home location (i.e. in a minibus or taxi), the driver will specifically need to ask a parent/carer to confirm that there are no symptomatic residents in the household (while maintaining at least 2m).

Children who display symptoms of what parents feel is a common cold should also NOT use the transport provided and the household should self-isolate for the prescribed period.

All learners will need to wash their hands thoroughly in accordance with national guidance before leaving their home for the learner transport journey and again in the afternoon at school.

If a learner at a bus stop in the morning/inward journey is symptomatic with recognised signs of covid-19 or is presented for travel with indications of covid-19, the driver will need to contact his/her employer before allowing the learner to travel.

If a child becomes symptomatic at school, including during the period immediately after the final bell (i.e. before boarding a learner transport vehicle), learners shall not board the vehicle. Instead, schools will invoke their own policies for virus containment and deal with the learner without their boarding a vehicle.

Expectations for Contractors

Contractors will have a revised and enhanced risk assessment and safe systems of work pertaining to the use of vehicles and employment of drivers during coronavirus. The Council has provided a model risk assessment to assist contractors. The contractors' assessment will include good practice at contractors' premises. Contractors shall share their completed assessments with the Council.

In order to reduce the possibility of infection, contractors will normally dedicate the same driver and same vehicle to each contract.

Drivers will consider their own fitness before undertaking each learner transport journey. Drivers are to be aware of their contractors' risk assessments, safe systems of work and national guidance.

The contractors will provide a seating plan for each vehicle and for each day of operation. Learners will be seated in accordance with their boarding and alighting points (first on/last off to be at the rear in appropriate vehicles). Where possible, the 2m distances will be maintained where appropriate and practical (this may not be feasible in all settings or may be relaxed marginally where high-back seats are fitted—see above). This can be reviewed upon any new guidance or directives from the Welsh Government.

For non-service buses or for vehicles without an appropriately approved screen, should operators deem it appropriate, having secured their vehicle, drivers may leave their cab to wait 2m outside the vehicle while learners board and alight. This is recommended. Learners will need to allow the driver to leave by keeping a minimum distance of 2m from the entrance.

To assist with the compliance and enforcement of the above, all vehicles with a capacity of over 16 seats will be fitted with operational CCTV. Contractors shall notify the Council if this not the case. Failure to provide a vehicle with such working equipment shall result in the application of financial deductions as specified under the Conditions of Contract.

Parking at establishments will be at the direction of schools and colleges.

Schools will be encouraged to ensure there are appropriate numbers of staff available to meet vehicles/leaners and upon arrival staff will escort learners from the vehicle to the building and, for the afternoon return, from the building to the contract vehicle in boarding order.

Wherever possible, boarding at schools should, be in reverse drop off order, with those being dropped off last at the rear of the vehicle. Note that if schools cannot control this, it will involve alighting learners moving past others and although this is not a high risk situation it should be avoided.

While on education premises as elsewhere, drivers shall remain a minimum of 2m from all other drivers and staff.

Vehicles should be naturally ventilated by use of opened windows or where available roof lights rather than climate control, air conditioning or forced air systems that recirculate air. Drivers of coaches that do not allow openable windows should ensure air conditioning is not set to recirculate air.

Schools may require staggered start and finish times, with arrivals expected to observe strict time slots. Local authorities and schools will inform contractors accordingly. Drivers should be instructed not to prejudice these times by waiting at stops (for late learners), and the contractor should notify the transport staff immediately if specified arrival times cannot be adhered to.

Cleaning

Contractors will ensure all vehicles are thoroughly cleaned once a day to a standard above that usually undertaken. Surfaces requiring special attention include steering wheel; handbrake, switchgear 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 easily disposed of disinfectant wipes.

Additionally, contractors will ensure that all internal and external touch points are wiped down between trips.

Drivers should wash hands frequently or use a suitable sanitiser gel can that should be a minimum of 70 per cent alcohol. Drivers must not leave cleaning products/sanitiser where passengers can reach them.

Seatbelts

Wherever possible, learners should be responsible for buckling their own seat belts. This may not always be possible for young children or those with specific additional needs. In such circumstances, where a pick up is at a home address, parents should ensure their children are safely buckled. A member of the school staff should do so at school.

The contractual responsibility nevertheless continues to rest with drivers and, where a driver would be expected to assist contractors, contractors should assess how drivers do this and what additional steps are required as a result.