

East Lothian Home to School Transport Guidance during Coronavirus Outbreak Dedicated Minibus and Coach Operation

This protocol sets out expectations and key guidance for transport contractors and their drivers concerned with the operation of Home to School routes framework 2019-23.

The protocol draws on national guidance and is aligned with Public Health guidance in order that consistent practice can be applied across schools and settings in East Lothian, and by the contractors who provide home-to-school transport to these.

The protocol is intended to help both contractors complete essential risk assessments, prior to the transportation of an increasing volume of children and young people as schools open to more learners in line with the government's direction.

Please note that national guidance is subject to change and this protocol could be affected by such changes; East Lothian Council will endeavour to update and issue revised versions of the protocol should this be necessary.

Section 1 General Principles:

Dedicated school transport should be regarded as an extension of the school estate and it is not necessary to maintain distance between children and young people of all ages (subject to continued low levels of infection within Scotland).

- There remains in place a general direction to parents and carers – namely that if a child has symptoms, or someone in their household does, they must not attend childcare settings, school or colleges.

In these cases, the following guidance applies: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing>

- Sustained social distancing is impossible to achieve in most situations involving home-to-school transport. It is therefore essential that care is taken in every other respect to avoid transmission of infection:
 - Seats alongside or immediately to the rear of the driver are out of use.
 - Rear-facing seats are out of use.
 - Occupation of available seats in any form of transport will be restricted (see further details in Section 2)

- Drivers, passenger assistants, children and young people using home-to-school transport are to wear a face covering for the duration of all journeys, (exceptions as outlined below - Section 3).
- Where possible, contractors should consider fitting a temporary plastic sheeting screen to isolate the driver from passengers and if possible plastic screen between rows <https://www.iwantfabric.com/clear-pvc-sheeting-plastic-vinyl-fabric-0-5mm.html>
- Procedures for boarding and alighting from transport will be regulated by the driver, as detailed in this protocol (section 3)
- The driver has the authority to instruct passengers about where they should sit in order to maintain safety, and this should be respected by passengers (Section 4)
- Drivers (and other staff employed by contractors) will need to receive training so that they can respond appropriately in a range of situations outlined in this protocol.
- Where a passenger wilfully fails to comply with instructions from a driver, this will be treated as a serious matter with sanctions that could include the immediate removal of entitlement to travel.
- Vehicles will be regularly cleaned following steps outlined in this protocol to prevent the spread of infection; drivers will maintain a responsible hygiene regime as outlined in this protocol. (section 6)
- In the event that a child starts to show coronavirus symptoms during transportation, the action outline in this protocol will be followed (section 8)
- If a child is unwell at their school or setting, the expectation is that, wherever possible, they will be collected by a member of their family or household. However, where this is not possible, the protocol outlines steps that would offer a driver safe means of providing transport to take the child home. (sections 7 and 8).
- Maintaining consistency: the same driver should be used for the operation of the contract unless exceptional operational circumstances make that impossible on a given occasion.

Section 2 Restricted occupation of available seats:

Transport operators should keep windows on dedicated school transport open, where possible, and to ensure that mechanical ventilation uses fresh rather than recirculated air; or use air conditioning with attention paid to the appropriate frequency for changes of filters.

Seats alongside or immediately to the rear of the driver are out of use.

Rear-facing seats are out of use.

Section 3

Safe boarding of vehicles and safe transit:

Face coverings: Children and young people using home-to-school transport, are recommended to wear a face covering for the duration of all journeys, in line with current government guidance about use of public transport, except for young children and those for whom doing so would create a medical risk, including anxiety. It is acknowledged that wearing face coverings will not be possible for a large proportion of pupils with special needs, not least because many would try to remove them and/or would become distressed. Schools should inform Transport Services of any pupil meeting this exemption.

Drivers face coverings, unless recognised medical conditions prevent this; in such circumstances, contractors will inform the Integrated Passenger Transport team immediately and an individual risk assessment will be undertaken.

Where face coverings are not worn by children and young people, East Lothian expects operators to work with schools and other settings to implement individual risk assessments for specific children and in specific circumstances.

Boarding when travelling to school: each passenger will be required by the driver to sit in the rearmost available seat unless specifically agreed otherwise due to reasons of child welfare. In a vehicle with multiple pick-ups, the passenger(s) boarding must do so one at a time, maintaining distance from the driver and other passengers, and sit where instructed to by the driver. Siblings may sit next to each other however this will affect the layout of the transport.

Boarding at school for home journey: every effort should be made to load passengers in reverse of drop off order, as per the seating plan (ie last drop-off should board first, sitting in the rearmost available seat). If this is not observed, passengers alighting at their home drop-off will briefly contravene distancing as they pass seated passengers. This is not a high-risk situation but is avoidable with careful planning.

Alighting the vehicle: Passengers should alight in reverse order of boarding, preserving distance.

Where passengers pass the driver's seat to board or leave the vehicle, the driver should turn off the engine and alight from the vehicle (using the driver's door if available) before the passengers board. *NB: In some cases this is not practical (ie: larger bus making multiple stops and when use of offside door is a safety hazard in the highway context).*

Section 4

Accountability:

The contractor is accountable for training drivers and other staff on the necessary actions they must take to keep themselves and others safe, in line with this guidance. This should include the safe wearing of PPE, when and if it is required: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/transport-transition-plan/guidance-for-transport-operators/#overview>

The driver has the authority to instruct passengers about where they should safely sit in accordance with this protocol. If instructions are not complied with, the matter should be immediately reported to the driver's employer and thence to the Transport Services and the relevant School for urgent attention. The probable sanction is likely to be the immediate removal of entitlement to travel.

Section 5 Seatbelts:

To avoid proximity between driver and children, parents should be asked to encourage their children to put seatbelts on themselves, as far as possible. Where assistance is required (likely to be youngest children), the parent/responsible adult should be encouraged to assist when boarding at home.

When boarding at school, the school staff in the child's "bubble" may be able to assist as required. However, where applicable, the legal responsibility of drivers to ensure a seat belt is worn properly is unchanged; but normally a visual check should be sufficient.

Section 6 Driver's responsibility for cleaning and hygiene:

Each vehicle should be carefully cleaned before and after every trip.

Regularly clean all surfaces, including:

- steering wheels, handbrake 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 disinfectant wipes where available as these are quick and effective to use and can be disposed of easily.

Drivers should use tissues to catch coughs and sneezes. Used tissues should be disposed of in a bin with lid as soon as possible.

Drivers should wash hands frequently with soap and water (keeping a bottle of water and soap in the vehicle for this purpose), doing this for at least 20 seconds each time. Sanitizer gel can also be used but should be a minimum of 60% alcohol. Drivers must not leave cleaning products/sanitizer where passengers can reach them.

Drivers are required to wear a re-usable face-covering, or they may choose to wear a disposable face mask if they have access to one (either provided by their employer or by themselves). If a visor is available, it may also be worn but must not be worn while driving. Drivers should consider that face visors may distress some passengers such as younger children.

If a driver needs to come close to a passenger – for instance, to check or assist with a seatbelt – this action can usually be done safely without the need of PPE. Maintain distance wherever possible, wash hands frequently and maintain clean surfaces as described above.

However, some situations may require the use of PPE, and these are described in Section 7, below.

Drivers should ventilate their vehicle with opened windows wherever possible (but be aware of the need to avoid risk of children leaning out of windows).

Do not set air conditioning or ventilation systems to recirculate air.

Parents/carers and teachers should help by requiring all children and young people using home-to-school transport to wash their hands thoroughly before each journey or use hand sanitiser. **Families should provide their child or young person with sanitiser for this purpose.**

Parents/carers and schools should seek to minimise the transportation of bags/equipment by ensuring children do not bring anything with them to school that they do not need.

Section 7 PPE requirements for each vehicle:

Under normal circumstances, i.e. there is no indication that any passenger has the symptoms of Covid-19, current guidance states that there is no requirement for PPE to be worn, apart from a face covering as stated in Section 1.

EAST LOTHIAN guidance identifies equipment that drivers and passenger assistants, where present, may need in emergencies. If a child or young person starts to display coronavirus symptoms in a vehicle, PPE must be worn. It must also be worn when transporting a child home who has displayed symptoms while at school and no parent or carer is available to provide transport.

In either of these circumstances, PPE must be worn by the driver, where present, if:

- a vehicle with a bulkhead is not available, or
- a strict distance of at least 2 metres cannot be maintained between the driver and the passenger and/or
- a risk assessment determines that the supervising adult is at risk of splashing to the eyes from, for example, coughing, spitting or vomiting.

The PPE required in these instances would be as follows:

- a fluid-resistant surgical face mask;
- disposable impervious gloves;
- a disposable plastic apron;
- if a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of fluids entering the eye from, for example, coughing, spitting or vomiting, then eye protection should also be worn.

For these reasons, a small supply of the PPE listed above must be available in all vehicles used to transport children from home to school and back.

It is the responsibility of the employer to provide PPE as described. In the event that a contractor is unable to source the necessary PPE, they should speak with the IPT team who may be able to provide advice.

Section 8 What to do if a passenger displays symptoms:

If a child or young person appears unwell with symptoms on the run to school:

On arrival at school, before any passengers alight, the driver should immediately inform the appropriate school staff about the concern. The school will take responsibility for handling the situation.

If a child or young person displays symptoms while at school:

Any child, young person or other learner who starts displaying coronavirus symptoms while at their school/setting should, wherever possible, be collected by a member of their family or household.

In exceptional circumstances, where this is not possible, the school/setting needs to take responsibility for transporting them home. Where, by agreement between the contractor and the school/setting, this is undertaken by a home-to-school driver, the following steps must be taken:

- if possible a vehicle with a full height partition screen between the driver and the passenger should be used.
- A vehicle of sufficient size must be used where the driver and passenger can maintain a distance of 2 metres from each other.
- The driver must use PPE as outlined above.
- The passenger should wear a face mask if they are old enough and able to do so.