

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

Home to School Transport: Special Arrangements over the COVID-19 crisis period

Sent 7.5.20 with deadline for consultation responses by Friday 22 May

Dear Transport Operators

This email sets out local guidance, additional to national guidance, for HTST in relation to:

- use of PPE
- social distancing
- cleaning of vehicles on HTST.

The guidance draws upon:

- government and Public Health guidance
- practice in other Local Authorities where known
- information from our local transport providers
- wider council guidance on the rationale for use of PPE
- risk assessments
- consultation with key stakeholders (families, schools, transport operators)

Government guidance does not currently recommend the use of PPE outside of care settings. This means that Government guidance does not require the use of PPE on transport or in schools. Recommendations for transport providers are in the guidance linked below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-staff-in-the-transport-sector/covid-19-guidance-for-staff-in-the-transport-sector>

We expect our transport providers to have made their own risk assessment in relation to COVID-19, based on the particular routes covered and the needs of the children on those routes, and to take action accordingly. We are aware that many providers are already using PPE and understand the rationale and reasons for this.

The advice and recommendations from the council for HTST, on the basis of the council's analysis, are as follows:

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) on Journeys

Where social distancing is reasonably achievable on HTST and where no physical contact need normally be made with children and young people by drivers and VPAs, we are not recommending the routine use of PPE. However, we understand that local providers may wish to use PPE on the basis of their own risk assessment in specific circumstances.

Where social distancing on HTST is not routinely possible, we are supportive of transport providers who are using, or wish to use disposable gloves and ordinary/ plain surgical masks as a precautionary measure. The reasons we have come to this conclusion are as follows:

- in Brighton and Hove, almost all our children and young people on HTST have severe and complex special needs and disabilities and are therefore particularly vulnerable - many have underlying health conditions, so need individual risk assessments and more protection than the general public on transport;
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance>

- drivers and VPAs will frequently need to support children on and off transport and into school via physical contact, as well as handle their personal equipment such as wheelchairs and frames and this increases the risk of cross-contamination;
- there is a risk of transfer of bodily fluid for some children and young people

Where there is routinely bodily contact and/or a significant risk of transfer of bodily fluid, the use of a disposable plastic apron is a sensible precaution also, but we believe this would be an exceptional need, determined by a provider's own risk assessment.

We are not recommending the use of PPE for children and young people on transport. Exceptional cases should be raised with the HTST team for discussion of the best way to balance risks to safety with meeting the special needs and disabilities of the child or young person, and their emotional wellbeing. Partnership with families will be essential to effective decision-making.

The acquisition of appropriate PPE is the responsibility of transport providers and not of the council. However the council acknowledges that PPE supplies can be difficult to acquire at the current time. In that context, providers who have exhausted all avenues for acquiring PPE can apply to the council for support on the form attached, which should be returned to Rob Glaister, interim team manager of the HTST service. The council will support suppliers as far as possible, but only if supplies cannot be accessed elsewhere, and subject to prioritisation and available stocks. There is no guarantee that the council can provide PPE and this should not be a routine demand when other avenues for accessing supplies are available.

PPE is only one effective measure within a package of administrative, environmental and management controls. This includes maintaining social distancing where practicable, monitoring staff and clients for coronavirus symptoms, and applying correct waste management and cleaning regimes. Where PPE is used, it is important to apply internationally recognised principles i.e. all PPE that is provided to help manage Coronavirus hazards should be:

- Provided and worn only in relation to an associated task risk assessment;
- Compliant with the relevant BS/EN standards (European technical standards as adopted in the UK) and used in accordance with manufacturers' instructions;
- Used after relevant staff training and fit testing where relevant (see resources below);
- Located close to the point of use;
- Stored to prevent contamination in a clean/dry area until required for use (expiry dates must be adhered to);
- Changed immediately following completion of a procedure, task, shift or session (as directed by the risk assessment); and
- Disposed of after use by double bagging waste in domestic waste bags and disposing after 72hrs into the appropriate waste stream.

Transport services will still need to follow the general Coronavirus avoidance guidance, even when using PPE. As such, staff will need to:

- Avoid close contact with others where possible i.e. within 2 metres
- Resist the urge to touch their face/mouth/nose/eyes
- Report any COVID-19 symptoms early, a new continuous cough or a fever, however, mild
- Cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue
- Regularly wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Where facilities are not available, hand-wipes may be used.

- Only use sanitiser/hand gels when hands are visibly clean.
- Avoid touching surfaces that may have been contaminated by others and clean such areas with an approved disinfectant frequently.

Social Distancing

The HTST service currently arranges transport for children and young people to allow for recommended social distancing as far as possible. As schools re-open fully, the HTST service will continue to make exceptional arrangements, as far as reasonable and practical, to maintain social distancing.

Government guidance acknowledges that social distancing will not always be possible on transport, and where this is problematic, the guidance suggests avoiding face to face contact as far as possible and ensuring good ventilation. The latest guidance (1st May 2020) on social distancing is below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others#eel-decline>

In order to preserve social distancing to the maximum degree possible while national policy is in force, the HTST service will, wherever possible and practical, limit the numbers of children and staff on vehicles as follows:

- a maximum of 2 students in a saloon or similar sized taxi, or 1 child and 1 VPA
- a maximum of 2 children and 1 VPA in an 8 seater vehicle
- a maximum of 4 children or 3 children and 1 VPA in in a larger public service vehicle (it may be possible to increase that number, subject to risk assessment, on the largest vehicles)

This will create inevitable challenges when more children and young people return to school and college, not least in terms of supply of extra vehicles needed and it is acknowledged that some disruption to normal arrangements will occur for a temporary period. However the safety of children and staff, in line with national guidance, is the paramount concern.

When schools re-open, there may need to be some staggering of journey times which will need to be arranged in partnership with schools, colleges and families.

This exceptional and challenging situation will require considerable goodwill, flexibility and partnership working over this temporary period.

The council is also supportive of operators who are installing, or investigating the installation of, screens between the front and back of vehicles or between the driver and front passenger seats with certain provisos. This potentially provides a protective barrier and could enable more passengers to be carried safely but such installation needs to be subject to professional and safe installation and maintenance, appropriate risk assessments in relation to passengers carried, and any considerations in relation to licensing and insurance cover.

Cleaning of vehicles

The council requires all transport operators and staff to follow national guidance, as previously circulated, on the cleaning of vehicles between passengers and to be meticulous about frequently cleaning and disinfecting objects and surfaces using the appropriate cleaning products. Please see guidance below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

The council prohibits the transport of passengers with confirmed COVID-19 on vehicles used for HTST under any circumstances. If someone becomes unwell while on their journey with a new continuous cough or a high temperature, they must be taken home.

If a passenger either on a school run or via another route has suspected COVID-19 symptoms, operators must follow national guidelines to carry out a very thorough cleaning of the vehicle concerned, using apron, mask and gloves and leave at least a 72 hour interval before next usage.

Where cleaning products and equipment cannot be accessed elsewhere, providers may be able to access supplies from the council via the attached form, although this is not guaranteed.