

GUIDANCE ON HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT FOR SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19



DATE: 18 AUGUST 2020

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Purpose & scope

This operational guidance is designed to help everyone travel as safely as possible on home to school transport during the Covid-19 outbreak and provide schools with further information on transport operations during this period. It reflects the requirements of the '[New School Day](#)' guidance published by the Department of Education on 13th August 2020 and is particularly relevant for dedicated school transport services to mainstream or special schools.

'Dedicated' school transport means any vehicle that only carries pupils and not members of the public i.e. an EA yellow bus, a dedicated Translink school service, a private hire bus or taxi contracted by the Education Authority for pupils. For the purposes of this guidance 'public' transport refers to transport services operated by Translink that carry both pupils and members of the public.

Advice for safe travel on public transport services is available at NI Direct (www.nidirect.gov.uk) and Translink (www.translink.co.uk).

Arrangements for the restart of home to school transport

As per the DE guidance, parents should be advised that home to school transport should only be used where there is no alternative available and are encouraged to use active travel.

24-28th August 2020

Limited school transport services will run from 24th-28th August with priority given to pupils in years 7, 12 & 14). This will be based on schools' normal times. If you are intending to operate a revised timetable you should consult with your local transport office to confirm if this can be facilitated.

'Limited' services means:

- **EA buses, private buses and taxis** – we're doing all that we can to stand up our services and have as many routes operating as possible on these dates. Where a service is operating pupils from any year group attending that week can use the service.
- **Translink** – as per usual Translink will continue to operate a reduced summer schedule of public services. 'Dedicated' school services will not operate on these dates. If a pupil connects to a Translink school service these will also

not be available and parents should make alternative arrangements for their child's whole journey to school. Sessional passes will be valid on public services from 24th-28th August and pupils are advised to visit the [Translink website](#) to confirm their journey before travelling.

1st September onwards

School transport will not operate on 31st August. All school transport services will resume as normal from 1st September 2020.

Help us to help your pupils

Here are the things that your pupils can do to help keep themselves, and others, safe on their journey:

- ✓ Wash their hands regularly and especially before you get on a vehicle.
- ✓ Use hand sanitizer when they get on board if it is provided.
- ✓ Wear a face covering when they can.
- ✓ Catch It, Bin It, Kill it! Carry tissues, cover coughs and sneezes.
- ✓ Fill seats from the back and sit apart if possible. If not, sit with a sibling or another pupil from the same class, year or school. Try to sit in the same seat each day.
- ✓ Give other passengers their space when queuing, and getting on and off the vehicle
- ✗ DO NOT travel if you are experiencing any symptoms of Covid-19 [symptoms](#) or your household has been advised to isolate. If a child is displaying symptoms our EA driver may speak to a parent about making alternative arrangements.
- ✗ DO NOT share phones or other personal items with other passengers.
- ✗ DO NOT eat or drink on board (unless it is required for medical purposes).
- ✗ DO NOT approach the driver.
- ✗ DO NOT litter. Take any rubbish with you and dispose of it safely.

We recognise that some of these steps may not be possible; particularly for children with a special educational need.

However, if we have reason to believe a child is putting their, or others', safety at risk by not following this guidance we retain the right to withdraw transport assistance.

What additional measures is the EA taking?

We are:

- ✓ Ensuring there is proper guidance in place for staff, parents and pupils, and private operators.
- ✓ Working closely with Translink to address any reduction in capacity due to social distancing on public services used by pupils
- ✓ Providing our staff with appropriate PPE that helps to keep them, and others, as safe as possible.
- ✓ Installing hand sanitizer units on EA vehicles.
- ✓ Cleaning our vehicles and common touch points regularly.
- ✓ Displaying signage in EA vehicles with key messages about hygiene.
- ✓ Advising drivers, escorts and operators not to attend work if they are displaying symptoms or have been advised to isolate.

What can schools do to assist school transport

In line with the DE guidance schools should:

- 👉 Promote the message that school transport should only be used where there is no alternative available.
- 👉 Promote key messages for pupils around hand hygiene, wearing of face coverings and social distancing.
- 👉 Put in place arrangements for managing the arrival/departure of pupils and, particularly in special schools, the transfer of children to their classrooms.
- 👉 Allow EA transport staff access to toilet and handwashing facilities and dispose of waste from their vehicles.
- 👉 Support transport staff to complete their vehicle cleaning at the end of each day. Your drivers may want to access water and/or store cleaning products.

FAQs

Will there be social distancing?

Social distancing is encouraged, but not required, on dedicated school transport. .

Social distancing is required on public transport so Translink are taking a range of measures, particularly for peak periods, to ensure eligible pupils continue to receive transport assistance.

Do pupils have to wear a mask on school transport?

Face coverings are strongly encouraged on school transport if you are able to wear and use them. Our staff will be wearing them. [Face coverings](#) are mandatory for over 13s on public transport.

Will escorts still travel with pupils?

Escorts will still travel with pupils if it is required. While they will try to give the child as much distance as possible their role will mean they will be in close contact. To protect them and your child they will be wearing PPE which could include a mask and face shield. Parents should prepare their child for this.

How often will vehicles be cleaned?

On EA buses common touch points will be cleaned twice a day. The vehicle will also be cleaned at the end of each day. If we are notified that we have transported someone with a confirmed case of Covid-19 the vehicle will be taken out of service for 72 hours and will be cleaned again before returning to service.

Translink have introduced enhanced vehicle cleaning and mobile cleaning teams travelling on board to clean common touch points. Private Operators have also been issued with guidance on cleaning regimes.

Will transport be checking pupils' temperatures before they board the bus?

Temperature testing is not currently planned for home to school transport and is not included with DE guidance for schools or transport. EA has though issued guidance to drivers/escorts and private operators on what to do if they have concerns than an accompanied or unaccompanied child is displaying symptoms. Please note that where a school identifies that a child attending school is displaying symptoms transport cannot assist with transporting them home.

If a pupil that travels on dedicated school transport tests positive, what happens?

A decision on whether there is a requirement to isolate will be a matter for the PHA's Contact Tracing programme. Where EA is notified of an incident we will remove the vehicle from service for 72 hours and clean it before it returns to service.

Some pupils have not received confirmation of their transport arrangements for September?

For many pupils travelling to school, unless their circumstances have changed (i.e. moved school or house) arrangements may not have changed from the previous year; but if they use a Translink service they should check their [website](#) for any changes to their schedule before travelling.

If a child has a special educational need and is travelling with us for the first time, or to a new school, our Transport Team or the Operator delivering the service will confirm arrangements as soon as possible. We recognise that parents want as much notice of these arrangements as possible. Unfortunately Covid-19 has meant this is taking place later than usual this summer following the recent confirmation of DE's schools reopening guidance. We are doing our very best to confirm arrangements as quickly as we can and will also explore temporary arrangements if appropriate.

If you have a specific enquiry you can call our Transport team on 028 9598 5959 (Mon-Friday, 8.30am-12.30pm and 1.30pm-5.30pm). Please bear with us at this time as we experience extremely high volumes of calls.

What happens if transport doesn't operate?

There may be occasions when we are not able to put transport in place or some services are unable to operate due to the challenges of Covid-19. We are sorry for the inconvenience. During September 2020, if a child is eligible for transport assistance and transport was not available, we will pay a parental allowance for the days a child attended school and transport was not available. Information on how to claim will be shared online as soon as possible and we will keep this position under review in line with our normal parental payment policy.

Will there be concessionary transport?

We will continue to provide concessionary transport to pupils who received it last year unless we require the seat for an eligible pupil. New requests for concessionary transport will not be considered before November 2020.

How will pupils receive their Translink passes?

Don't worry! Translink sessional passes will be distributed as normal through schools and Translink will advise their drivers on what to do if a pupil doesn't have their pass in the first weeks of schools re-opening. Translink sessional passes are valid on public services from 24th-28th August.