

Home to School Transport (HTST) - Return to School - September 2020

The Department for Education has recently published detailed guidance to aid local authorities and schools in planning transport for the return to school of all pupils in September 2020. This guidance recognises that capacity on public transport remains limited due to the requirement to maintain social distancing.

Home to School Transport in September is a priority for the County Council. We are actively working to understand and, where necessary, supplement the public transport network and existing Home to School Transport to ensure that school pupils and college students can travel to school or college safely with minimum disruption.

From the Autumn term, local authorities will not be required to apply the social distancing guidelines for public transport on dedicated school or college transport. However, there are a number of controls and protective measures that may be put into place to reduce any concern regarding COVID-19 risk on dedicated school transport.

Through our Home to School Transport Team, we are communicating with transport operators, schools and colleges and will be working with them to adopt measures that address the identified risk, works in the local circumstances and enables children and young people to attend their school or college.

Please find below some anticipated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's):-

Q. What is the safest way for my child to travel to school?

A. Walking or cycling remain the safest methods of getting to school where this is possible. Parents may choose to drive their own children to school.

Q. Will my child be required to wear a face covering on transport?

A. If your child is over 11 and travels on public transport, then it is mandatory to wear a face covering, unless they are exempt from doing so on medical grounds.

If your child is under 11 and is accompanied on public transport by a parent/carer then it is mandatory for the parent/carer to wear a face covering, unless they are exempt from doing so on medical grounds, but not for the child.

If your child is travelling on dedicated home to school transport, no matter what their age, then the advice is for them to wear a face covering where possible, but it is not mandatory. Drivers and Passenger Assistants are also advised to wear face coverings where possible, but it is not mandatory.

Schools are responsible for implementing a procedure for the removal of face coverings once the child has disembarked the vehicle. We would expect a bin to be available for disposable masks and any used tissues before the pupils enter the school. Pupils should bring a sealed plastic bag with them from home to store re-usable masks in, following their use on transport. We would appreciate it if you could prepare your child for this to enable this measure to be successful.

Q. Will there be hand sanitiser provided on the vehicle?

A. Public bus and home to school transport operators have been advised to provide hand sanitisers. Children and Passenger Assistants will be expected to sanitise their hands upon boarding and disembarking the vehicle. We expect parents to supply their child with their own hand sanitiser which can be used in preference to the supply in the vehicle. We would appreciate it if you could prepare your child to actively use hand sanitiser.

Q. Is my child expected to carry tissues when travelling on school transport?

A. Children are encouraged to carry tissues on home to school transport and any used tissues should be disposed of in a covered bin upon arriving at school.

Q. My child usually receives a free Scholar Season Ticket for use on public transport. Will they still get one?

A. Yes – public transport operators are working with the County Council to ensure adequate provision to get all children who usually use a public bus to travel to school, working within the current social distancing guidelines for public transport. Tickets will be available for collection from schools at the start of September as usual.

Q. My child usually has a dedicated school bus run by the Local Authority to a mainstream school – how will this run in September?

A. We anticipate that most services will run as at the start of the last academic year. There is no requirement to socially distance on dedicated home to school transport services (school buses). We will aim to load buses seated in year groups where possible. Signage will be provided on the bus to indicate where your child should sit. Transport operators will ensure good ventilation of fresh air in the vehicle, wherever possible, by keeping windows or roof lights open. You should ensure that your child is wearing adequate clothing in order to keep warm during the journey. Small changes to your school's start and end times might be accommodated, meaning your child's pick up and drop off time might change. You will be notified if your child's transport times change. We would appreciate it if you could prepare your child to support these measures being effective on our buses.

Q. My child usually travels on a taxi/minibus to a mainstream school – how will this run in September?

A. There is no requirement to socially distance on dedicated home to school transport services. We will be loading vehicles of 16 seats and fewer as usual, with as much space as possible between pupils. All available seats may be used where necessary. Transport operators will ensure good ventilation of fresh air in the vehicle, wherever possible, by keeping windows or roof lights open. You should ensure that your child is wearing adequate clothing in order to keep warm during the journey.

Small changes to your school's start and end times might be accommodated, meaning your child's pick up and drop off time might change. You will be notified if your child's transport times change. We would appreciate it if you could prepare your child to support these measures being effective on our vehicles.

Q. My child travels on transport to a Specialist SEN Provision – how will this run in September?

A. There is no requirement to socially distance on dedicated home to school transport services. We will be loading vehicles of 16 seats and fewer as usual with as much space as possible between pupils, but all available seats may be used where necessary. Transport operators will ensure good ventilation of fresh air in the vehicle, wherever possible, by keeping windows or roof lights open. You should ensure that your child is wearing adequate clothing in order to keep warm during the journey. Drivers are advised to wear face coverings at all times when inside the vehicle. School Escorts/Passenger Assistants will be provided if required. Drivers and School Escorts/Passenger Assistants will not normally be required to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) however, where the care of a child ordinarily requires it, this will continue. Small changes to your school's start and end times might be accommodated, meaning your child's pick up and drop off time might change. You will be notified if your child's transport times change. We would appreciate it if you could prepare your child as much as possible to support these measures being effective on our vehicles.

Q. My child hasn't received their new bus pass yet for September?

A. Pupils starting a new school should have received their bus pass in the post by the end of August. For continuing pupils, we will be sending out bus passes to schools during the first few weeks of September for distribution. You should have no issues using your existing bus pass (from the last academic year) initially and the driver should not challenge you.

We have three schools that will be newly operated by a sole transport operator for September (these arrangements were made pre-COVID-19) – Henry Beaufort, Mountbatten and Itchen Abbas. Pupils attending these schools will be notified of new arrangements and bus passes before the end of August.

Q. My child has an EHCP and I am concerned about additional risks on transport due to their medical needs – is there anything that the Home to School Transport Service can do to help?

A. We can offer any parent who has a child with an EHCP a parental mileage allowance to drive their child to school for the Autumn term. If you are eligible for this option, then you should have received an email from the Service in July. Please contact the Service if you have not heard about this or wish to re-consider your decision to take up the offer by sending an email to school.transport@hants.gov.uk.

Q. My child's Special Educational Needs are complex and I am concerned they may be at additional risk and/or put their Passenger Assistant or driver at additional risk. What should I do?

A. There are many scenarios which we will need to consider at this unprecedented time.

Please email us on SEN.transport@hants.gov.uk to discuss your concerns. We are here to help with advice and, hopefully, find a solution to try. When sending an email please type 'COVID-19 concern' including your child's initials in the subject line. We don't always know the children as individuals, so we are reliant on your information for this type of concern. Please also see question above regarding a parental mileage allowance as this may be an option for you.

Q. I would like to drive my child to school and they usually go on a contracted vehicle to a mainstream school or use public transport. Is there any reimbursement available to me?

A – No not at this time – currently, our parental mileage allowances are only offered to pupils with an EHCP.

Q. What additional responsibilities can I expect of the driver?

A. Drivers will not be responsible for policing the use of face coverings, hand sanitiser and seating arrangements – their role is to focus on driving the vehicle safely. Measures have been put in place and it is the responsibility of the parent to prepare their child to be aware of their own health and safety where possible.

Q. What other safety measures can I expect on the vehicle?

A. Drivers should ventilate vehicles as much as possible travelling with windows and sun-roof open and air conditioning flowing where practicable. Operators will be asked to cleanse the vehicle in between journeys and different services with household cleaning equipment/products.

Q. My child has come down with COVID-19 symptoms whilst at school – can they be transported home on home to school transport?

A. No – it is the responsibility of parents or carers to arrange for unwell /symptomatic children to be collected from school.

Q. My child was sent home from school yesterday with possible COVID-19 symptoms but they seem fine today – can I send them to school on transport?

A. No – we would advise, in line with the current NHS guidance, that the child isolates at home for ten days. Where cases are known to us, we will be actively

advising Drivers and Passenger Assistants not to collect the child during that time. If you can provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test for the child within the ten days, then we will be able to resume the transport service for them. It is your responsibility to follow the NHS Test and Trace guidance which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>

Q. My child was sent home from school with a temperature – will you be informing the Driver/Passenger Assistant or other pupils on the vehicle?

A – No, not specifically about the temperature– we would expect that you would arrange for your child to be tested for COVID-19 and then the NHS Test and Trace system would inform anybody necessary of a positive outcome. The Driver/School Escort will be advised to not collect your child in line with the self-isolation period. However, if you are able to produce a negative test result on any of the school days within the ten-day period then please contact us to resume transport.