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Dear Transport Operators

Special Arrangements over the COVID-19 Crisis Period: Updated HTST Working Guidance

Our thanks again for the dedication and flexibility you and your staff continue to show over the pandemic period towards the transport of our children and families. We appreciate the responsiveness and consideration you have shown over these uncertain times.

Drawing upon the latest DfE guidance issued on 11.8.20, (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020>), this letter sets out updated working guidance for September 2020 onwards, including:

- risk assessments over the pandemic period
- suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases on transport
- use of PPE and face coverings
- social distancing
- cleaning of vehicles

This letter does not attempt to replicate or include all that is contained within Government and Public Health guidance and directives, which should be read separately and followed. Please do also read the latest guidance in the link above and use this to update your own risk assessments.

The safety and wellbeing of your staff and our children and young people is very important to us.

This is an anxious time, so operators and staff will need to maintain strong empathic relationships with children and young people using HTST and their families, and to be sensitive to the safety and emotional wellbeing of children and young people at a difficult time. Please bring any problems or issues to the attention of the Home to School Transport Service. We are here to help.

Regular parallel communications are being sent to our parents and carers, which we will ensure operators receive.

Risk Assessments

Government guidance requires operators to have conducted a risk assessment for dedicated their school transport services. This will determine the most appropriate safety measures to put in place such as for social distancing and face coverings. The [guidance for operators](#) provides further advice for staff. You may also find the following link useful:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/vehicles>

In conducting your risk assessment, you need to be mindful of:

- *risks to workers, passengers, customers and the public, along with the control measures required*
- *the impact of control measures and whether they result in additional, different risks or non-compliance with other requirements (for example health and safety or equalities legislation)*
- *applying the hierarchy of controls set out in the [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#)*
- *consultation with workers, or bodies representing workers, and the public*
- *the visibility of the results of any risk assessment*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators#risk-assessment>

The HTST service requires a copy of your updated risk assessment to be sent to Hometoschooltransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk by the 31.8.20.

Suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

The main symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a high temperature
- a new, continuous cough
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste

Transport staff who develop symptoms that might indicate COVID-19 should to home and get a test.

Anyone with symptoms must follow [Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#).

Government guidance on staff who come into contact with a passenger showing coronavirus symptoms is that they do **not** have to go home and self-isolate unless:

- they develop symptoms themselves (in which case, they should arrange a test)
- the symptomatic person subsequently tests positive and they were in contact within 48 hours of them first displaying symptoms
- if they have been requested to do so by NHS Test and Trace

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020>

Staff must wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with soap and running water or use hand sanitiser if they have been in contact with someone with symptoms.

If a child has symptoms of COVID-19 while on board a vehicle, transport staff should take them home. **Do not take the child to school.** Clean the vehicle thoroughly before the next journey. If there are no family members at home or if there are any complications with this advice, call the HTST team.

If a child develops symptoms of COVID-19 while at school, the school **should not ask you to take the child home.** The parents or carers should be asked to take the child home. Please call the HTST team if you are unsure what to do or if parents/ carers are unable to collect.

The council prohibits the transport of passengers with confirmed COVID-19 on vehicles used for HTST under any circumstances.

For more information where children have particularly complex needs, follow the links below:

- [How should I care for children who regularly spit or require physical contact?](#)
- [Guidance on the specific steps that should be taken to care for children with complex medical needs, such as tracheostomies](#)

Response to any infection

Operators along with the Local Authority must ensure they understand the NHS Test and Trace process and how to [contact their local Public Health England health protection team](#). Operators must require drivers and passenger assistants to [book a test](#) if they display [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) symptoms](#).

If you are unsure what to do in relation to any of the above, call the HTST team for advice.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Face Coverings on Journeys

Government guidance states that the routine use of PPE by transport staff is unnecessary.

Drivers and passenger assistants will not normally require PPE on home to school transport, even if they are not able to maintain a distance from the children and young people on the transport. This is because....children and young people with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) must not board home to school transport.

If the care a child or young person usually receives on home to school transport requires the use of PPE, that should continue.

However, guidance also says that:

Face coverings offer some benefits in work situations where [social distancing](#) is difficult to manage. For example, when working in passenger facing roles including when providing assistance to disabled passengers.

Public health advice is that staff wear a face covering when they are unable to maintain social distancing in passenger facing roles, recognising that there will be exceptional circumstances when a staff member cannot wear a face covering, or when their task makes it sensible (based on a risk assessment) for them not to wear a face covering.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators>,

The council acknowledges that social distancing is often not possible on HTST. We require 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. This will determine the most appropriate safety measures to put in place such as for social distancing and face coverings. The [guidance for operators](#) provides further advice for staff. The council is supportive of the outcomes of individual providers' risk assessments in relation to PPE, providing they are carried out to a suitably high standard.

We are aware that our providers are using PPE, particularly masks and gloves, and are supportive of the rationale and reasons for this, proving such equipment is used and disposed of properly (please see attached guidance on the donning and doffing of PPE).

Please note also face masks must:

- cover both nose and mouth
- not be allowed to dangle around the neck
- not be touched once put on, except when carefully removed before disposal
- be changed when they become moist or damaged
- be worn once and then discarded - hands must be cleaned after disposal

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings-including-the-use-of-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

The advice from the council for HTST is as follows:

- Where social distancing on HTST is not routinely possible, we are supportive of transport providers who are using, or wish to use masks or other face coverings as a precautionary measure and where risk assessment deems necessary, plastic gloves and aprons. This is subject to PPE being of the **required standard and the operator providing staff with guidance and training on the effective use of and disposal of PPE**. Please see the attached guidance from Public Health in this respect.
- 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, the routine use of PPE may not be considered necessary. However, we understand that local providers may wish to use PPE on the basis of their own risk assessment in specific circumstances.

The acquisition of appropriate PPE is the responsibility of transport providers and not of the council. Suppliers can access PPE of a verified standard via the government website <https://www.crowncommercial.gov.uk/covid-19/covid-19-buyer-information/safer-working-supplies/>

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 hometoschooltransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk. 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
- 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.

Please see attached Public Health guidance on donning and doffing PPE.

You are aware that the special needs and disabilities of our children and young people mean that many find change very difficult to cope with, so where there are changes you are making on safety grounds, the council asks operators to ensure families are aware and can work with you to prepare children and young people appropriately. We will work in partnership with you and our families over this.

Face Coverings for Children and Young People

With regard to face covering for children and young people, current guidance on mandatory use of face coverings does not apply to dedicated home to school transport nor are children and young people with disabilities of any age required to wear face coverings on transport.

Latest guidance says:

*It is now the law that children and young people aged 11 and over must wear a face covering on public transport. **This law does not apply to dedicated school transport. However,** we recommend that local authorities advise people aged 11 and over to wear a face covering when travelling on dedicated school transport to secondary school or college from the start of the autumn term. This does not apply to [those who are exempt from wearing a face covering on public transport.](#)*

We believe this is an appropriate balance, because:

- *the overall risk to children and young people of serious illness as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19) is very low*
- *they do not mix with the general public on those journeys*
- *home to school transport often carries the same group of children and young people on a regular basis, and they may also be together in school or college*
- *the predictability of home to school transport will allow for planning so that protective measures can be put in place*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020>

However, children over 11 years on transport do not need to wear a face covering if they have a legitimate reason not to. This includes:

- if they have a physical or mental illness or impairment, or a disability that means they cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering
 - if putting on, wearing or removing a face covering would cause them severe distress
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers#exemptions-face-coverings>

Transport operators and their staff must not require children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities to wear face coverings for the reasons above. **Please do not ask parents/ carers or young people to provide or wear face coverings.** If there are any issues with this, please contact the HTST team.

Older and/ or more able young people over 11 years of age may wish to wear a face covering. This should be at the parent or carers' discretion and should be safe. We do not want transport staff to fix face coverings in place for children and young people and parents/ carers should not ask you to do this, as this could result in greater risk. Young people must be capable of using a face covering correctly as failure to do so could increase the chances of virus transmission. If any problems arise in this respect, please contact the HTST team.

Social Distancing

For the autumn term 2020, the HTST service has continued to arranged transport with reduced numbers on vehicles to allow for greater social distancing. This is in line with the most recent DfE guidance, published on 11.8.20, which states:

As set out in the [guidance for full opening for schools](#), for [special schools](#), and for [places of further education](#), from the autumn term local authorities will not be required to uniformly apply the social distancing guidelines for public transport on dedicated school or college transport. However, the full opening for schools guidance also sets out that distancing should still be put in place within vehicles wherever possible.

It is of vital importance to work through the steps set out in this guidance. In particular:

- *social distancing should be maximised within vehicles wherever it is possible, between individuals or 'bubbles'*
- *it is very important to maximise the ventilation of fresh air (from outside the vehicle) on dedicated school and college transport, particularly through opening windows and ceiling vents*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020>

In order to preserve social distancing to the maximum degree possible while national policy is in force, the HTST service is limiting the numbers of children and staff on vehicles, leaving a spare seat between every child wherever practical and possible.

We are aware that with some very large vehicles and some seating alignments, it may be possible to accommodate another child safely on some routes and that there may be good practical reasons for this over the pandemic period, **but this must be agreed with the HTST team in advance**. Partnership with parents and carers is also crucial as they must be in agreement with any variance to standard arrangements.

The council requests that operators:

- allocate specific seats to children
- avoid the use of 'face to face' seating wherever possible
- ensure good ventilation through open windows wherever practical
- make careful arrangements for boarding and disembarking from vehicles to preserve social distancing where possible.
- Consider 'first in last out' policy with those children getting on first seated at the rear of the vehicle and the vehicle filling forward.

Screens

The council is 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> updated 15.7.20. It states:

All surfaces that the symptomatic person has come into contact with should be cleaned and disinfected, including all potentially contaminated and frequently touched areas such as bathrooms, door handles, telephones, grab rails in corridors and stairwells

Use disposable cloths or paper roll and disposable mop heads, to clean all hard surfaces, floors, chairs, door handles and sanitary fittings – think one site, one wipe, in one direction.

Use one of the options below:

- *a combined detergent disinfectant solution at a dilution of 1,000 parts per million available chlorine (ppm av.cl.)*

or

- *a household detergent followed by disinfection (1000 ppm av.cl.). Follow manufacturer's instructions for dilution, application and contact times for all detergents and disinfectants*

or

- *if an alternative disinfectant is used within the organisation ensure that it is effective against enveloped viruses*

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. If a child is diagnosed with COVID-19, the vehicle must be cleaned as above and left for 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.

Please remember to call the HTST team for any issues where there are concerns or you are unsure what to do on 01273 292501.

With best wishes

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