

ADVICE FROM THE COVID-19 ADVISORY SUB-GROUP ON EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S ISSUES

16 July 2020

School transport

The best and safest way to re-open schools is in the context of low community transmission and with a clear strategy towards driving case numbers continually towards zero. Given Scotland's current low prevalence, the advice given here on school transport is appropriate. If the further unlocking of restrictions, including indoor settings and tourism, results in an increase in cases in late July and into August, there will need to be flexibility in the use of this advice and variation among areas depending on transmission in their local community. This could mean that distancing may be required, and the use of face coverings introduced in school transport if prevalence increases. However the overall objective is to continue to push incidence and prevalence down across Scotland and to re-establish school transport as normally and fully as Covid-19 prevalence makes possible. Flexibility is necessary within local areas to make the best decisions based on local data on community transmission.

Key messages

- As far as it is safe to do so, children and their parents/carers should be encouraged to travel to school on foot, bike or scooter.
- Dedicated school transport should be regarded as an extension of the school estate and physical distancing measures between pupils are not necessary (subject to continued low levels of infection within Scotland). We recognise that school transport will involve mixed age groups of pupils, but still consider the risk of transmission to be acceptably low when mitigations are in place.
- Important mitigations include: hygiene, ventilation, improved cleaning regimes including regular and thorough cleaning of surfaces, and regular handwashing. Hand sanitising should be required for everyone on every entry to dedicated school transport.
- Where public transport (including buses, taxi, trams, subway, trains, ferries and air) is required for school-aged children to attend school, the general advice and guidance from the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland should be followed. This currently includes the mandatory use of face coverings and physical distancing where possible.
- Drivers and staff on public transport, and to a lesser extent on school transport, are at relatively higher risk of exposure and particular attention should be paid to ensuring that they are protected from airborne and surface transmission.
- Local authorities should continue to work with public transport providers to increase capacity as far as is reasonably possible and consider the introduction of staggered start/finish times.
- The advice that follows is contingent on there being low levels of infection in the Scottish population and on systems being in place for close monitoring, rapid testing and tracing of suspected cases.
- Measures put in place as precautions may become more relaxed as the prevalence and incidence of Covid-19 in Scotland reduce. Conversely, measures may need to be strengthened or reintroduced if there is evidence of a resurgence, or in the light of localised outbreaks. Where other relevant new evidence has implications for this advice, it will also need to be taken into account.

- This advice is based on a balance of evidence, bringing evidence specifically about Covid-19 together with evidence relating to the wider wellbeing of children and benefits of education.

Context

- In May, the SAGE Environment and Modelling Group published advice on the transmission and control of SARS-CoV-2 on public transport¹, recognising that there is an enhanced risk of transmission for both passengers and transport workers on public transport.
- The most recent Scottish Household Survey data show that about 14% of children in full-time education in Scotland usually travel to school by school bus, and a further 6% by public transport (either service bus or rail)². The recent Hands Up Scotland survey³ published in June 2020 shows a similar picture, with 16% of pupils reporting travelling by bus (see Figure 1).
- Active travel (such as walking or cycling) to school is the most prevalent school travel mode and brings a range of benefits including for children's health. It is also the mode of travel that carries least risk of transmission of coronavirus. Schools and local authorities are therefore urged to encourage children and their parents/carers to travel to school on foot, by bike or scooter as far as it is safe to do so. The same applies to staff.
- Transport Scotland's latest summary statistics⁴ note that from 2007-2017, between 23% and 27% of all bus journeys were taken by people who were permanently retired. Public bus journeys are therefore likely to bring together those at lower risk of contracting and transmitting Covid-19 (younger people) with those at higher risk. Such a situation is unlikely to occur on bus travel that is provided for school pupils only.
- Transport Scotland has published advice on staying travel safe during Covid-19⁵. This advice is regularly updated in line with progress through Scotland's routemap through and out of the crisis⁶.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emg-transmission-and-control-of-sars-cov-2-on-public-transport-18-may-2020>

² <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/transport-and-travel-in-scotland-results-from-the-scottish-household-survey-1/>

³ <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/projects/2019/scotland/hands-up-scotland-survey>

⁴ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/transport-and-travel-in-scotland-results-from-the-scottish-household-survey-1/table-15-travel-to-school-school-children-in-full-time-education-usual-method-of-travel-2018/>

⁵ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/travel-guidance-during-covid-19/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making-scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/>

Figure 1: Hands Up Scotland Survey (published June 2020)

The latest figures from an annual survey of children and young people, and how they travel to school:

The travel modes are categorised as follows:

- **Active travel:** walking, cycling and scootering or skating
- **Public sustainable travel:** bus
- **Multi-mode travel:** park and stride (driven part of the way by car and walk the rest)
- **Private motorised travel:** driven (car) and taxi.

Private motorised travel

25.5% of school pupils surveyed in 2019 said they normally travel to school using only a private motorised mode of transport.

This is the highest proportion of private motorised travel since the survey began. Previously, this figure had ranged from a low of 23.0% in 2013, to a high of 24.8% in 2018.

The proportion of pupils being driven to school in a car decreased steadily from 22.9% in 2010 to 21.4% in 2013, and has since increased to 23.8% in 2019.

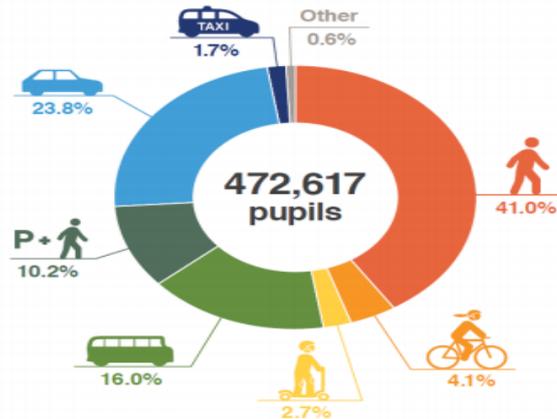
Travel to school by taxi has remained stable, increasing from 1.6% in 2010 to 1.8% in 2016, and decreasing to 1.7% in 2019.

Active travel

47.8% of school pupils surveyed in 2019 said they normally travel to school in an active way, without any form of motorised transport.

Active travel has consistently remained the most frequently reported mode of travel to school in Scotland, from 49.3% in 2010, to a high of 50.4% in 2014. **Since 2014, active travel has steadily decreased to a low of 47.8% in 2019.**

Walking to school has decreased from 45.8% in 2010 to a low of 41.0% in 2019. Cycling to school has increased from 2.8% in 2010, to a high of 4.1% in 2019. Scootering or skating has increased from 0.7% in 2010, to 2.7% in 2019, which is close to the highest recorded levels of 2.9% in 2015 and 2016.



Multi-mode travel

10.2% of school pupils surveyed in 2019 said they normally park and stride to school.

Overall, the percentage of pupils travelling to school by park and stride has increased from 7.4% in 2010, to a high of 10.2% in 2019.

Public sustainable travel

16.0% of school pupils surveyed in 2019 said they normally travel to school by bus.

Overall, the percentage of pupils travelling to school using the bus has decreased from 18.2% in 2010 to a low of 16.0% in 2019.

1. Whether, how and when can physical distancing be reduced for school-age children on dedicated school transport and other modes (private hire vehicles, etc.), including what mitigation measures (if any) would be required in the event of a reduction in physical distancing?

- The Covid-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues (hereafter referred to as the sub-group) advice on physical distancing in schools⁷ states:
- “Subject to continued suppression of the virus and to surveillance and mitigations being in place, the balance of the evidence suggests that no distancing should be required between children in primary schools. The evidence is less clear for older pupils but at present we support the same approach being taken in secondary schools on the basis of the balance of known risks and the effectiveness of mitigations. Two metre distancing should remain in place wherever possible between adults, and between adults and children who are not from the same household.”
- The sub-group recommends that dedicated school transport is considered to be part of the greater school estate and therefore all mitigations which apply in school should also apply on dedicated school transport. The sub-group noted that adult members of the public do not travel on dedicated school buses and therefore the physical distancing measures that should be applied are those relating to distances between pupils. Specific circumstances to protect drivers are addressed later.
- Mitigations include: hygiene, ventilation, improved cleaning regimes within dedicated school transport, including regular and thorough cleaning of surfaces, and regular handwashing. Hand sanitising should be required for everyone on every entry to dedicated school transport. Schools should regularly reinforce the importance of this key message with all children and young people. Hand washing/hand sanitising should be done regularly throughout the day including on each and every entry to the school building and school bus. The sub-group recommends that as far as possible school-aged children are assigned seats which they use consistently; and that the consumption – and especially the sharing – of food and drink (including snacks) is not allowed.
- Children or young people must not board dedicated school or public transport if they, or a member of their household, have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). If a child or young person develops symptoms while at school they will be sent home. They must not travel on regular home-to-school transport. The school should contact the parent/carer who should make appropriate and safe arrangements to collect the child or young person. In this situation, we strongly advise the wearing of a face covering by the child or young person on the journey home.
- For school-aged children travelling on dedicated school transport or public transport, schools should reinforce the importance of social responsibility in line with the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence and the development of responsible citizens.
- As a way to increase school transport capacity, local authorities are encouraged to continue to work with transport providers to support staggered start and finish times in the school day. Other additional capacity should be sought where practical.

⁷ Published alongside this paper, here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advisory-sub-group-on-education-and-childrens-issues/>

2. Would this advice differ by age of the child or young person, and what should be the position for drivers and/or other adults travelling with school-age children on dedicated school transport?

- In line with the advice on physical distancing, this advice would apply to all school-aged children travelling on dedicated school transport.
- Where it is possible and practical to do so, family groups should travel together, and children and young people from the same class groupings should travel together. This will reduce unnecessary mixing and is one way to further lower risk. As a primarily preventive measure, we would advise against schools sharing school buses if possible at this point in time.
- Any adults travelling by dedicated school transport should conform with the requirements for public transport (1 metre distancing with the wearing of face coverings, at the time of writing).
- We recognise that the circumstances of many children with Additional Support Needs require adult carers to travel with the children, often in close proximity. In general, it is advised that these adults should be very alert to symptoms, and should wear face coverings as a general rule. However, this should be balanced with the wellbeing and needs of the child, recognising that face coverings may limit communication and could cause distress to some children.
- Drivers and staff on public transport, and to a lesser extent on school transport, are at relatively higher risk of exposure and particular attention should be paid to ensuring that they are protected from airborne and surface transmission. In some situations environmental changes within a vehicle may be appropriate, such as the installation of protective barriers or safety screens between the driver and passengers⁸. It is for the relevant licensing authorities, operators and the firm or individual to make decisions on whether changes within a vehicle are required, based on their own assessment of risk.
- Drivers and other staff assistants should follow general hygiene guidance. Where hand washing is not possible hand sanitiser should be used regularly throughout the journey, in particular after performing any tasks that involve touching a surface that may have been touched by someone else.
- Drivers and other staff must not continue to work if they have symptoms, or if someone in their household has symptoms. They should make appropriate arrangements to go home as soon as possible if they begin displaying symptoms while at work, and should follow the Test and Protect system guidance.

⁸ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/transport-transition-plan/guidance-for-transport-operators/#63878>

3. What implications might any such advice have for school-age children travelling on public transport to/from schools?

- The advice of the sub-group is that school-aged children on public transport should follow the generic guidance⁹ from Transport Scotland. This includes wearing face coverings and physical distancing where possible. The effective use of mounted sanitizers, wipes and touch-free bins should be viewed as essential to reduce the transmission of the virus. The sub-group recommends that schools work with all children and young people to develop their capacities as responsible citizens particularly when on public transport.
- Local authorities should work with transport providers to increase capacity and introduce dedicated seating/carriages for school-aged children where possible, so that school-aged children may be grouped together.
- Local authorities are recommended to work with transport providers to gain assurance that infection prevention and control measures are in place¹⁰.

4. Should face coverings be advised or mandatory for those travelling on dedicated school transport (under current or reduced physical distancing)?

- Face coverings should not be required for most children (those clinically advised to wear a covering would be an exception) travelling on dedicated school transport. This is the current statutory position as stated in The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020¹¹, in which it is noted that the requirement to wear a face covering on public transport does not apply on a school transport service.
- Similarly, a person providing a passenger transport service is not required to wear a face covering where there is a partition between the person/employee and members of the public.
- Where adults are travelling with school-age children, face coverings should be worn. The particular circumstances of adults travelling with children with additional support needs has been mentioned above.

⁹ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/transport-transition-plan/guidance-on-travelling-within-scotland/>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emg-transmission-and-control-of-sars-cov-2-on-public-transport-18-may-2020>

¹¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2020/103/part/3A>