

COVID-19 Policy

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Policy Name: Transportation During COVID-19	
Approved by motion of the Board on	28/09/2020
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Cross Reference: T1 - Access to Empty Seats T5 Cancellation of Transportation Services T7 - Public Transit Services T9 School Bus Safety T10 - Stakeholder Responsibilities T11 Stop Locations and Drop Offs T13 Student Discipline on Contract Vehicles T14 - Transportation Services T17 Weighted Loading Capacity for School Buses T19 Bell Times Management T21 Accessible Transportation T22 Transportation for Students in a Joint Custody Arrangements and Having Two Homes T23 Active Transportation	
Related Forms: Application for Access to Empty Seats on School Bus Vehicles Request for Transportation to Two Homes for Students in a Joint Custody Arrangement School Calendar – Transportation Schedule	

Policy Statement

1. The OSTA shall establish procedures that meet the Federal, Provincial and Municipal guidelines for health and safety as they relate to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The OSTA shall coordinate operational responses with its Member School Boards, Ottawa Public Health and its contracted Operators in the event a suspected or positive COVID-19 case is identified.

3. Parents shall be responsible for assessing the health of their child(ren) on a daily basis using a standard self-assessment tool approved by their school board, and ensuring their child is not a risk for the transmission of COVID-19, prior to accessing transportation services.
4. Drivers shall conduct a self-assessment on a daily basis using a standard self-assessment tool approved by the Province of Ontario or their employer, and shall advise their employer if they have COVID-19 symptoms and cannot report to work.
5. The Operator shall be responsible for establishing policies and procedures that comply with any regulations, rules, policies, directives, and/or other instructions from Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health.
6. Students in grades KG to 12 shall be required to wear a mask or face covering, unless exempted due to a medical condition or special needs on all vehicles.
7. Drivers shall be required to wear a mask or face covering unless exempted due to a medical condition or if it interferes with their vision during driving.
8. Schools shall be responsible for creating a seating plan for each morning and afternoon run that groups family bubbles and/or classroom cohorts to the extent possible, to reduce the possibility of transmission of the virus and to facilitate contact tracing. The seating plan will allow as much physical distancing between students as possible, while respecting existing OSTA policies relating to loading capacity.
9. The empty seat/courtesy seating program shall be suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic.
10. Vehicles shall be cleaned in accordance with the Ministry of Education's Guidelines.
11. In the event a school has confirmed cases of COVID-19, Ottawa Public Health shall determine which high-risk individuals (including students and/or drivers) must remain in isolation and the length of time the isolation must occur to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 to other students and/or the driver. This may lead to transportation services being cancelled for either or both Member School Board schools connected to the route.
12. The OSTA shall make reasonable efforts to inform parents of the cancellation of regular home to school transportation services when such services are cancelled due to COVID-19 protocols or any other reason.
13. This policy shall override any other OSTA policy, where applicable.

14. The General Manager/Chief Administrative Officer shall be authorized to establish procedures as may be necessary to support this policy

Procedure

Parents'/Guardians' daily responsibility to assess their child's health

1. Parents must assess their child's health before sending them on the bus/van or dropping them off at school. Please see Public Health Ontario resources on COVID safety and a self-assessment tool.

[Public Health Ontario Resources](#)

[Self-Assessment Tool](#)

2. Parents will be required to pick up their child at the bus stop or at the school immediately upon identification of a sick child. Unsupervised sick students at the stop will be isolated on the vehicle upon boarding, to the extent possible. The student will be required to wear a mask during the trip to school, unless exempted due to a medical condition or special needs.
3. The Principal will determine if an identified student may return home on the bus, with proper precautions. Students with severe symptoms such vomiting, fever, or persistent cough, should not be allowed to board the bus back home.

Preparing students for their trip to school

4. Respiratory and hand hygiene are critical mitigation strategies that limit the transmission of viruses. All students are strongly encouraged to wear masks or face coverings while waiting for the bus. Students are also encouraged to wash their hands thoroughly and/or use hand-sanitizer prior to going to the stop, and then sanitizing their hands again (using their hand-sanitizer) before boarding the bus.
5. Students in KG to grade 12 are required to wear a mask, unless unable to do so for medical reasons or due to special needs. Reducing COVID-19 risk of transmission is everyone's responsibility.
6. All students should review basic school bus safety rules, available on OSTA's website.

Selecting the best mode of transportation for individual family bubbles

7. Eligible students and their parents who choose not to use OSTA's transportation services should complete a Transportation Opt-Out Form as soon as possible. This will assist OSTA, the School and Public Health to perform contact tracing on students who are actually riding the bus, if a suspected case of COVID-19 is identified.
8. Eligible students may opt back into the service at any time, although reassignment to transportation may take some time depending on the volume of changes.
9. It is recommended that parents and students use active transportation to get to school as much as possible. Walking and cycling/scootering or other wheeled devices the whole way, or part of the way, will reduce traffic around the school and provide a mask-free experience.
10. OSTA has suspended the Empty Seat/Courtesy Seating Program this year due to the uncertainty of COVID-19 restrictions.

Student Behaviour Management

11. Reducing the risk of transmission between students will depend upon their behaviour while riding the bus. New rules regarding mask-wearing, hand-hygiene and physical distancing will be communicated frequently and reinforced with visual and verbal cues on the bus.
12. Students are expected to respect their seating assignment, even if it means they are seated with their siblings or classmates, rather than their friends or by themselves. These are all necessary precautions to reduce transmission and to facilitate contact tracing if there is a COVID positive case reported.
13. School bus safety rules are designed to reduce injury to students on their ride to and from school. Students should remain seated with their backpack on their lap and avoid "horsing-around". They should not eat or drink on the bus to avoid choking, allergic reactions, spills and garbage. Bullying on the bus, whether verbal or physical, will not be tolerated.
14. Students who do not follow general school bus safety rules, and/or who cause disturbances on the bus with their unruly behaviour, may be temporarily or permanently suspended from receiving transportation services.

Seat Assignments

15. Students who live in the same household will be expected to sit together, while single riders may be grouped with classmates, to the extent possible.
16. The School prepares the seat assignment and Drivers will be responsible for telling students in which seat they should sit. Seats will be clearly numbered. The student must stay in their assigned seat during every ride in order to maintain cohort bubbles to the extent possible. Kindergarten students will be seated near the front, and parent/guardian will be required to meet them at their stop, as usual.
17. Seat assignments may change due to new registered students, however OSTA may attempt to limit changes to seat assignments, if necessary.
18. Students with a mask exemption reported to the school will be clearly marked on the seating chart. Every effort should be made to seat students who cannot wear a mask by themselves, to the extent possible.

Waiting at the stop

19. Parents/guardians and students are expected to do their best to maintain adequate physical distance between family groupings. A distance of 2m between families is suggested.
20. Stops where there are many students (i.e., apartment buildings, congregated stops) may be divided into 2 or more stops in order to allow space for smaller groups of students to wait.
21. It is important that students arrive at their designated stop at least 5 minutes before the posted stop time and to have their masks on while waiting.
22. Once the bus arrives, students should not crowd the front door. Rather, students should line up while maintaining a 2m physical distance between them, where possible. No more than one student should be on the stairs at a time. Students should get to their assigned seat and sit down with their bag on their lap as quickly as possible.

Meeting the Driver

23. Drivers will be expected to wear a mask unless they are unable to do so due to a medical condition or because it interferes with their vision. As students board, drivers may be wearing a mask and face shield or goggles.
24. Because Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is designed to protect the wearer, drivers of yellow buses and vans will have the option to wear whatever PPE they feel protects them best. This means drivers may wear their own cloth masks or may be provided medical-grade masks, should they

so choose. They may or may not wear face shields or goggles during loading or while responding to a first aid event.

25. Ottawa Public Health deems drivers who wear medical grade masks and eye protection, such as face shields or goggles, as low risk of transmission during contact tracing, whereas, drivers who opt to wear cloth masks and no eye protection are considered high risk of transmission during contact tracing.
26. Drivers of wheelchair buses may be required to wear additional PPE, not only to protect themselves, but also to protect each student from cross-contamination, depending on circumstances. These drivers should wear a face shield or goggles, a mask and a paper gown when handling and securing individual students' wheelchair. This is due to the close proximity between the driver and the student, and the higher potential for body fluid transmission. The driver should use hand-sanitizer before and after handling each student, or wear disposable gloves.

Loading and unloading at the school

27. Upon arriving at the school, students will unload from the front to the back, one seat at a time, while maintaining physical distance between them.
28. Students should use their personal hand-sanitizer as soon as they get off the bus and before entering the school, if possible. Schools will direct students to make their way to the appropriate location for their class cohorts.
29. At dismissal time, Schools will do their best to maintain class cohorts until it is time to load buses/vans. Class cohorts may be separated into family cohorts upon loading, based on seat assignments.

School Active Transportation

30. It is recommended that students and their parents engage in active transportation as much as possible. Walking/biking all the way, or driving and walking partway, are excellent ways to add physical activity to their day, it also helps reduce vehicle traffic around schools, creating a safer school zone for children and improving air quality for all.

The Walking School Bus Environment

31. The Walking School Bus (WSB) at select schools will continue with precautions. The WSB leader will be wearing a mask and some may also wear a face shield if they prefer to and/or gloves.
32. Younger students who cannot maintain physical distance from one another will be required to hold a rope which will be marked by tape to demonstrate the correct intervals for individual walkers. This rope will be cleaned between each run.

33. Older students, who understand and respect physical distancing, may follow behind the younger group.
34. Students are not required to wear masks outdoors, but should bring them for school. Students should have their personal hand-sanitizer to clean their hands prior to holding the rope and directly after they arrive at school.

The Yellow Bus Environment

35. Assigned seating by family bubble or classroom bubble, to the extent possible. Seats will be clearly numbered and the driver will indicate in which seat each student should sit.
36. Loading capacity will be as normal, with a full load being 46-70 students, depending on the number of eligible students and their grade level. Students may be seated 2 or 3 per bench. Physical distancing will be exercised where possible.
37. Students in KG to grade 12 are required to wear a mask, unless unable to do so for medical reasons or due to special needs.
38. The bench behind the driver will be left vacant, to the extent possible. This bench may be used to isolate a sick child, or to transport their own children (with OSTA's previous approval).
39. Deep cleaning of vehicles twice a day with an approved disinfectant. Once after the morning runs and once again after the afternoon runs. The handrail, a high touch area, will be cleaned after every run.

Public Transit Environment

Safer door-to-door

40. Masks are mandatory on all public transit buses and trains and in service stations.
41. OC Transpo has developed a "safer door-to-door" brochure that will be distributed by schools to students when they get their Presto cards. The brochure shows a simple step-by-step process that outlines how to use the transit system, and includes messaging on health and safety measures such as always wearing a mask and using hand sanitizer.

The Van Environment

42. Parents and school staff must wear a mask when securing students within the van.
43. Parents may choose to use a non-scented, disinfectant wipe to clean any plastic or metal surfaces where their child will be sitting. Spray will not be permitted.
44. Senior students sitting in the front seat must wear a mask.
45. Students in KG to grade 12 are required to wear a mask or face covering, unless unable to do so for medical reasons or due to special needs.
46. Assigned seating by family bubble or classroom bubble, to the extent possible. Up to 6 passengers may be loaded on each small vehicle. Physical distancing will be exercised where possible.
47. Deep cleaning of vehicles twice a day with an approved disinfectant. Once after the morning runs and once again after the afternoon runs.

The Wheelchair Bus Environment

48. Driver may wear gown, face shield or goggles, mask, and gloves, depending on the circumstances. Driver will use hand-sanitizer before and after loading each student, or wear gloves.
49. Assigned seating by family bubble or classroom bubble, to the extent possible. Seats will be clearly numbered and the driver will indicate in which seat each student should sit.
50. Loading capacity will be normal. Ambulatory Students may be seated 2 or 3 per bench. All wheelchair positions will be used to secure students using wheelchairs.
51. Students in KG to grade 12 are required to wear a mask, unless unable to do so for medical reasons or due to special needs.
52. The bench behind the driver will be left vacant, to the extent possible. This bench may be used to isolate a sick child.
53. Deep cleaning of vehicles twice a day with an approved disinfectant. Once after the morning runs and once again after the afternoon runs. The handrail, a high touch area, as well as any other affected areas, will be cleaned after every run.

Bus Attendants and Monitors

54. Bus attendants and monitors will wear increasingly protective gear, depending on their role within the bus/van. Any individuals that come into close proximity with a student (i.e., to load and secure the student) will likely wear a gown, face shield or goggles, a mask and gloves. An alternative to using gloves is to use hand-sanitizer before and after handling each student.
55. Individuals who are only monitoring students and who are not required to enter into the 2m physical space around students for any reason, will only be required to wear masks, unless unable to do so, and may choose to wear face shields or goggles.

Contact Tracing and Service Impacts

56. In the event there is an individual, whether School Staff, Driver or Student, identified as potentially having tested positive for COVID-19, and who may have come in contact with students on a particular bus, the School will contact the local Public Health Unit.
57. The Public Health Unit will conduct contact tracing based on predetermined criteria and advise the school and affected individuals regarding next steps to take. This may or may not include self-isolation, or other measures.
58. The Principal contacts the Operator and OSTA to advise when and potentially how transportation might be affected.
59. OSTA determines if transportation at a particular school must be suspended on a per case basis, considering:
 - a. Whether some students assigned to the vehicle may still be able to attend school and are not required to isolate (i.e., vaccinated 7/8 students in a mixed load, students who were not on the bus during the period of contagion)
 - b. Whether parents will have received and/or understood the information not to send their children to school within a reasonable timeframe to avoid stranding students at stops on short notice
 - c. Whether a driver is available to perform the route
 - d. Whether it is safer to perform the route as designed or whether temporary changes to the route are possible
60. OSTA communicates service impacts to parents via electronic means, as necessary.

Immunization Disclosure and Rapid Testing

61. It is not mandatory for drivers to be vaccinated against COVID 19, however it is highly recommended.
62. Operators are responsible for establishing policies and procedures that meet any and all regulations, rules, directives and/or instructions from Ontario's Chief Medical Officer.
63. Operators must collect and store information regarding the vaccination status of individual drivers. OSTA will not collect, store or otherwise record driver vaccination status, or other personal health information to protect the driver's privacy.
64. On a monthly basis, Operators must provide OSTA with aggregate numbers of drivers who:
 - a) are fully vaccinated with supporting documentation
 - b) are fully vaccinated without supporting documentation
 - c) are vaccinated but 14 days has not passed, or who are partially vaccinated and have confirmed an appointment for a second dose
 - d) have provided a documented medical exemption from a doctor or nurse practitioner
 - e) have reported they are not vaccinated (excluding d and e)
 - f) have not yet reported (if known)
 - g) have reported they are not vaccinated and/or have not reported their status at all, and have not completed an educational program
65. OSTA will report the total aggregate numbers to both Member School Boards, who are then responsible for posting the aggregate data as part of their online vaccination status dashboards.
66. Operators will ensure that any driver who is not vaccinated (and who does not have a medical exemption), or any driver who has not disclosed their vaccination status, will view the Ministry's educational video regarding the COVID vaccine and will keep a record of the training.
67. At least twice weekly, 48 hours prior to working, drivers who are not vaccinated, or who have not disclosed their vaccination status, must perform rapid antigen testing and attest, in writing or with a photo, of a negative test.
68. Drivers who get a positive result from the rapid antigen test must not report to work, and must demonstrate proof of a negative COVID test from an accredited testing facility.
69. Operators will keep a record of drivers' tests and results (negative or positive) such that aggregate data may be collected at a later date.