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Policy Name: Transportation During COVID-19

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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, including special instructions from the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health, 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 all grades, drivers and transportation staff, are strongly encouraged to wear a mask and/or other PPE, at their discretion.
7. Vehicles shall be cleaned in accordance with the Ministry of Education's Guidelines.
8. Transportation services may be cancelled due to a COVID-related circumstance, at the discretion of OSTA.
9. 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.
10. This policy shall override any other OSTA policy, where applicable.
11. 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.
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 all grades are strongly encouraged to wear a mask, however it is optional. 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 families

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.
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 temporarily 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. 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.
13. 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.

Waiting at the stop

14. It is important that students arrive at their designated stop at least 5 minutes before the posted stop time and are strongly encouraged to have their masks on while waiting.
15. Once the bus arrives, students should not crowd the front door. Rather, students should line up in an orderly fashion. It is recommended that no more than one student should be on the stairs at a time. Students should get to their seat and sit down with their bag on their lap as quickly as possible.

Meeting the Driver

16. As students board, drivers are strongly encouraged to wear a mask and face shield or goggles, at their discretion.
17. Drivers of wheelchair buses are strongly encouraged to wear a face shield or goggles, a mask and a paper gown when handling and securing individual students' wheelchair, where possible. 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

18. 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.

School Active Transportation

19. 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

20. The Walking School Bus (WSB) at select schools will continue with precautions. The WSB leader is strongly encouraged to wear a mask and some may also wear a face shield if they prefer to and/or gloves, at their discretion.
21. 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.
22. Older students, who understand and respect physical distancing, may follow behind the younger group.
23. Students are not required to wear masks outdoors, although it is strongly encouraged. 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

24. 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.
25. Students in KG to grade 12 are strongly encouraged to wear a mask, at their discretion.
26. 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).
27. Deep cleaning of vehicles once a day with an approved disinfectant.

Public Transit Environment

Safer door-to-door

28. Masks are strongly encouraged on all public transit buses and trains and in service stations.
29. OC Transpo continues to keep its riders safe using health and safety measures such as enhanced cleaning and hand sanitizer.

The Van Environment

30. Parents and school staff are strongly encouraged to wear a mask when securing students within the van, at their discretion.
31. 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.
32. It is strongly encouraged that Senior students sitting in the front seat wear a mask.
33. Students in KG to grade 12 are strongly encouraged to wear a mask or face covering, at their discretion.
34. Up to 6 passengers may be loaded on each small vehicle. Physical distancing will be exercised where possible.
35. Deep cleaning of vehicles once a day with an approved disinfectant.

The Wheelchair Bus Environment

36. Drivers are strongly encouraged to wear a 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.
37. 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.
38. Students in KG to grade 12 are strongly encouraged to wear a mask, at their discretion.
39. The bench behind the driver will be left vacant, to the extent possible. This bench may be used to isolate a sick child.
40. Deep cleaning of vehicles once a day with an approved disinfectant.

Bus Attendants and Monitors

41. Bus attendants and monitors are encouraged to wear increasingly protective gear, depending on their role within the bus/van, at their discretion. Any individuals that come into close proximity with a student (i.e., to load and secure the student) are strongly encouraged to wear a gown, face shield or goggles, a mask and gloves, at their discretion. An alternative to using gloves is to use hand-sanitizer before and after handling each student.

42. Individuals who are only monitoring students and who are not required to enter into the 2m physical space around students for any reason, are encouraged to wear a mask, and may choose to wear face shields or goggles, at their discretion.

Contact Tracing and Service Impacts

43. As of January 2022, schools will no longer be performing contact tracing and a formal notification of a positive COVID case will only be made at the discretion of the school board, if the information is available.
44. OSTA determines if transportation at a particular school must be suspended on a per case basis, considering:
 - a. 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
 - b. Whether a driver is available to perform the route
 - c. Whether it is safer to perform the route as designed or whether temporary changes to the route are possible
45. OSTA communicates service impacts to parents via electronic means, as necessary.

Immunization Disclosure and Rapid Testing

46. It is not mandatory for operators' staff and drivers or OSTA staff to be vaccinated against COVID 19; however, it is highly recommended.
47. Full vaccination means having received at least 2 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.
48. OSTA and 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.
49. OSTA and Operators individual staff and drivers who get a positive result from the rapid antigen test must not report to work, and must isolate according to Public Health guidance.