

Fall Reopening Transportation Guidance

July 22, 2020

Introduction and overview of guidance

This transportation guidance supplements [DESE's Initial Fall School Reopening Memo](#). The initial memo put forth the goal of the safe return of as many students as possible to in-person school settings – *as in-person school is the best way to ensure student learning and continued social and emotional growth*. The safe transportation of students to and from school is a critical part of achieving this goal. In developing this supplemental transportation guidance, the health and safety of students and transportation staff remain our top priorities.

This guidance focuses on supporting districts to develop a transportation strategy that provides safe conditions for all students and staff traveling by bus, while also maximizing in-person learning:

1. **Follow the medically-advised health and safety requirements** for school bus transportation summarized below.
2. **Address bus capacity challenges** created by the physical distancing requirements on the school bus by considering strategies such as adding bus routes, staggering schedules, and pursuing a waiver for student learning time requirements if needed.
3. **Take proactive steps to promote safe alternative transportation options** for students, including family-provided transportation, walking, and biking, as appropriate.

The Department developed this guidance through collaboration with infectious disease physicians, pediatricians, and public health experts from Massachusetts General Brigham Health System and the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. We also consulted with the Massachusetts COVID-19 Command Center's [Medical Advisory Board](#), comprised of physicians and other health experts, which carefully reviewed the health and safety requirements for bus transportation outlined in this document.

Please note that this guidance is being issued on July 22, 2020 and is subject to change depending on the COVID-19 trends and as we learn more about the virus from medical research.

Core health and safety practices

Several core practices will support safe school bus operations this fall:

- **Masks**
All staff and students on the bus, regardless of age, are required to wear masks at all times. Exemptions for students due to medical and/or behavioral reasons – and associated protocols – are further described later in this guidance.
- **Distance**
Students should be seated *no more than* one student per bench, alternating sides for each row, which allows students to maintain approximately 3 feet of physical distance. Children from the same household may sit together and in closer proximity (e.g., two students per bench). Diagrams are provided later in this guidance.
- **Ventilation**
Keep windows open at all times during operation, unless not possible due to extreme weather conditions.
- **Seat assignments**
Students should be assigned to a single bus and a particular seat.

- **Bus monitors**

Districts should consider adding a bus monitor (e.g., volunteer, student leader, or staff member) for every bus to ensure strict adherence to these health and safety guidelines.

Transportation planning and surveys

Developing transportation plans

Each district should develop a **transportation plan** that follows the protocols outlined in this guidance. Districts should gather input from contracted transportation providers to develop these plans. Drivers and other transportation staff (e.g., bus monitors, if applicable) must be trained on the transportation plan prior to school reopening.

Surveying families to understand school bus demand

We advise districts to develop a family survey that includes questions on expected bus ridership, if not already conducted. Districts should consider administering the survey more than one time prior to the start of the school year. The survey should proactively encourage parents and caregivers to pursue alternative transportation options when possible.

Districts should consider collecting the following information via surveys:

- How many students will return to school in the fall in-person?
- How many families/students are planning to use alternative transportation?
- What offerings/incentives might persuade families to use alternative transportation?
- What modes of alternative transportation will families/students be likely to use (e.g., walking, biking, driving, carpooling)?
- How many households will have two or more students riding the same bus (to allow more than one student per bench)?
- Might any students/parents/caregivers be willing to serve as bus monitors?

Other implementation considerations

Seat assignments and boarding

Assigning specific buses, routes, and seats to students and staff in advance will limit potential exposure and make contact tracing easier to conduct.⁴ In addition, to prevent crowding and minimize interaction, students and transportation staff should follow the protocols outlined below when entering or exiting the vehicle.

Bus seating configuration

In alignment with the Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance, the following bus configuration (i.e., one student per bench, alternating sides for each row) represents the **maximum*** school bus occupancy achievable while maintaining approximately 3 feet of physical distance.

***Note:** Children from the same household may sit together and are excluded from the one student per bench requirement.

Symptom screening

Checking for symptoms each morning by families and caregivers, before students arrive at the bus stop, is critical and will serve as the primary screening mechanism for COVID-19 symptoms.

- **Bus drivers or bus monitors (if applicable) should be appropriately trained to observe students upon entry.** If students appear symptomatic, and a parent/caregiver is present to take them home, they should not be permitted to enter the school bus. If a parent/caregiver is not present to take them home, bus monitors should refer students who may be symptomatic to the school healthcare point of contact immediately upon arrival.
- **If a student who may be symptomatic must board the vehicle, they should be spaced at least six feet from other students as feasible.** Close off areas used by the student, and do not use those areas again until after cleaning and disinfecting.
- **Consider posting signs at bus entrances clearly indicating that no one may enter if they have symptoms of respiratory illness or fever.**
- **If children become sick during the day, they should not be permitted to travel home via school bus.**

Masks

Everyone on the bus and waiting at bus stops must wear masks that cover the nose and mouth at all times.

- **Adults**, including drivers and other transportation staff (e.g., bus monitors), **are required to wear masks.**
- **Students are required to wear masks, regardless of age, when on the bus.**
- **Exceptions to masks for students:** Face shields may be an option for students with medical, behavioral, or other challenges who are unable to wear masks. Please see the “physical distancing” section below for protocols on how to work with families of students who cannot wear masks due to medical, behavioral, or other challenges.
- **Masks should be provided by the student/family**, but districts must ensure that sufficient extra disposable masks are made available on all buses for any student who needs them.

Physical distancing

As reviewed and advised by the Massachusetts COVID-19 Command Center Medical Advisory Group, students must maintain a minimum distance of 3 feet from others, unless they are members of the same household.⁹ For transportation, this means one student per bench, alternating sides for each row.

The following distancing standards must be implemented in conjunction with strict adherence to health and safety requirements:

- Distancing requirements apply both while **waiting at bus stops and while in transit.**
- **Children from the same household should be seated together** and may be seated two or more students per bench (closer than 3 feet).
- **As may be appropriate, consider marking off ground at bus stops** where students can wait at 6 feet of physical distance from one another (if not wearing masks).
- **Students should face forward at all times** and refrain from eating, shouting, singing, or sharing items while in transit.
- **Determine and post maximum occupancy for each bus** while following these distancing guidelines.

- **Students who are not able to wear a mask while riding the bus** should maintain 6 feet of distance between themselves and other students. If possible, the student should wear a face shield while on the bus. Districts should work with the families of students who are regularly unable to wear a mask regarding possible alternative transportation arrangements (i.e. walking to school or the family transporting the student).

Hand sanitizing

Install hand sanitizer dispensers on buses for students and drivers to clean hands as they board and exit. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent ethanol or at least 70 percent isopropanol content can be used.¹⁰ Hand sanitizer should be applied to all surfaces of the hands in sufficient quantity that it takes 20 seconds of rubbing hands together for the sanitizer to dry.

- **Hand sanitizer dispensers should be placed only at the entrance of school buses within view of the bus driver or monitor** to ensure appropriate use. Students and staff are required to exercise hand hygiene (handwashing or sanitizing) upon arrival to school.
- **During winter months, students wearing gloves upon entry should be encouraged to keep gloves on at all times** during transit to the extent possible. If the student wishes to remove the gloves, they should follow the hand sanitizing protocols outlined above upon entry and exit.

Ventilation

Mitigate airborne transmission by increasing outdoor air ventilation. Doing so helps dilute the concentration or displace the presence of an airborne virus. Opening windows can greatly increase the level of ventilation within a school bus and therefore reduce COVID-19 transmission risk.

- **Keep windows open at all times during operation**, unless not possible due to extreme weather conditions. Even in cold or rainy weather, bus windows should be kept open at least partially (a couple of inches), if possible.
- **Consider keeping roof hatches open** on buses during operation for further ventilation.

Cleaning and disinfecting

Coordinate with the district transportation department and contracted transportation providers to ensure vehicles are properly cleaned and disinfected. *At a minimum, high-touch surfaces (see examples below) must be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly after each morning route and after each afternoon route using EPA-approved disinfectants.* The interior of each vehicle must be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly at least once each day.

- **Clean high-touch surfaces first and most frequently**, including buttons, handholds, pull cords, window latches, rails, steering wheels, door handles, shift knobs, dashboard controls, and stanchions.
- **Conduct thorough routine cleaning of vehicles**, including dusting and wet-mopping vehicle floors, removing trash, wiping heat and air conditioner vents, spot cleaning walls and seats, dusting horizontal surfaces, cleaning spills, etc.
- **Routine cleaning outlined above should be completed prior to disinfection** to remove all surface matter.
- **Doors and windows should remain open when cleaning the vehicle.**
- **Staff should be trained to use disinfectants in a safe and effective manner** and to clean up potentially infectious materials and body fluid spills. All sanitizing and disinfecting solutions must be

labeled properly to identify the contents and kept out of the reach of students.

- **Drivers and monitors should have adequate supplies** of soap, paper towels, tissues, hand sanitizer, garbage bags, and other critical cleaning supplies.
- **Mechanics will sanitize buses daily prior to use utilizing an electrostatic sanitizing sprayer.**

Precautions for transportation staff

Bus drivers and monitors face potential exposure through close contact with passengers, contact with high-touch surfaces, or by touching their mouth, nose, or eyes. Older individuals and those with serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19. To mitigate these risks, all bus drivers and monitors should take the following precautions when transporting students:

- **Avoid touching surfaces** often touched by passengers.
- **Wear masks** covering the nose and mouth at all times.
- **Use gloves if required to touch surfaces contaminated by bodily fluids.**
- **Maintain proper hand hygiene.** Wash hands regularly with soap and water when available for at least 20 seconds and use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Don't report for duty if sick.**