



COVID-19 TRANSPORTATION RESPONSE PLAN

August 17, 2020



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Throughout the spring and summer, STEO has collaborated extensively with the Ministry of Education, our local school boards and school bus operators, neighbouring consortia and local public health to develop a plan to mitigate risks associated with COVID-19 for transported students and school bus drivers for the upcoming school year.

This plan has as its driving factors the health and well-being of students, bus drivers and the community and it incorporates the recommendations of the Ministry of Education, Transport Canada, and our wonderful and engaged local health authorities.

Due to varying local conditions across the province, neighbouring boards/consortia may have a somewhat different approach regarding certain aspects relating to student transportation.

The information below summarizes Student Transportation of Eastern Ontario's (STEO's) transportation response plan to support School Reopening in September 2020. STEO will remain responsive to guidance from the Ministry of Education and our local health authorities and will augment the plan as necessary to meet or exceed safety standards.

Opting Out of Transportation

- If eligible families choose not to access STEO's transportation services beginning in September 2020, we ask that you "opt out" as soon as possible via the surveys provided through your school boards.
- Opting out where feasible will bolster STEO's ability to reduce capacity on school vehicles to support physical distancing.
- Eligible families may opt back into transportation service at any time by contacting STEO directly. Reassignment to transportation may take some time, depending on the volume of incoming changes.

Contact Tracing

- If a bus driver or bus monitor is identified as potentially having COVID-19, the bus company will contact the local Public Health Unit. The Public Health Unit will conduct contact tracing based on predetermined criteria and advise STEO, the bus company, the school and affected individuals regarding next steps, which may or may not include self-isolation and/or other measures.
- The local Health Units have advised that once a case of COVID-19 is suspected, they are to be notified and will provide direction on next steps.

Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

- To reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to other students, bus drivers and school staff, parents/guardians must assess their child's health before sending them on the school purpose vehicle or dropping them off at school.

- If a member of the student's household develops symptoms of COVID-19, it is recommended that the parents/guardians keep the student home, and conduct a self-assessment using the self-assessment tool available at the link below.

Please use Ontario's COVID-19 self-assessment tool. It provides guidance on next steps <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>

- Upon identification of a symptomatic child, parents will be required to pick up their child at the bus stop if possible or at the school.
- In the case of unsupervised students displaying symptoms at the stop, attempts will be made to contact the parents/guardians of the student. In cases where a parent/guardian is unavailable, the student will be isolated on the vehicle upon boarding to the extent possible and met by school staff upon arrival at school.
- Our local Health Unit has advised that a child who develops symptoms while at school should not be permitted to return home on a school vehicle and must be picked up by a parent or guardian.

Preparing Students for the Ride to School

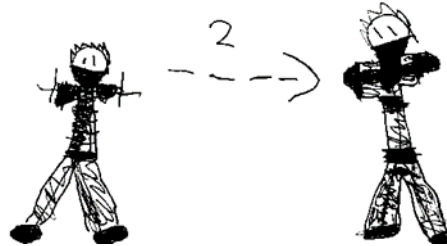
- **STEO is preparing a video to help orient students and parents/guardians to new expectations on the school bus. The video is now available for viewing at [this](#) link.**
- Students should wash their hands thoroughly and/or use hand-sanitizer prior to leaving for the bus stop.
- It is recommended that students carry with them hand sanitizer for personal use and sanitize their hands again just prior to before boarding the school vehicle.

Guidance from our Local Health Authorities around Use of Masks on the School Vehicle

- As students may be in close contact with others for prolonged periods of time, we highly recommend that students in grades JK to 3 wear non-medical face coverings/masks while traveling on school vehicles. Students in grades 4 and up are required to wear face coverings on school vehicles, as per the provincial school reopening guidelines.
- Exemptions can be made for students with breathing or cognitive difficulties, or for those who are unable to apply or remove a mask without assistance.
- A non-medical face covering/mask can be the disposable type or made of cloth. Bandanas, scarves, and gaiter masks are also acceptable face coverings.
- While a face shield is not a substitute for a mask, it may be worn by a student who has an exemption and would provide more protection than going without a face covering.
- Parents/guardians should speak to their children about the importance of proper mask wearing and keeping their masks on for the full duration of the bus ride.

Waiting at the Stop

- Parents/guardians and students are asked to do their best to maintain adequate physical distance between family groupings at shared bus stops. Two metres between families is recommended.



- Bus stops that service many students (e.g. at apartment buildings or collector locations) may be divided by STEO into multiple stops to provide for smaller groupings and support physical distancing.
- It is important that students arrive at their designated stop at least 5 minutes before the posted stop time.
- Once the bus arrives, students should not crowd the front door, but should line up while maintaining a two-metre physical distance, where possible.
- No more than one student should be on the bus stairs at a time.
- Students should go to their assigned seat as quickly as possible and sit down with their school bag on their lap.
- To reduce the spread of germs, and for contact tracing purposes, students are not permitted to change seats during the trip to or from school. More on this later under Seating Assignments.

Your (Wonderful) Bus Driver

- As students board the school vehicle, drivers will be wearing a mask and face shield or goggles. This can be surprising for children, who may not recognize their driver's friendly face behind a mask. Parents/guardians should consider discussing this with their children before their first trip on the bus this fall, to help put their minds at ease.
- Drivers will wear a medical-grade mask. They will also wear a face shield or goggles during the loading and unloading of students.
- If responding to a first aid event, drivers will wear gloves, a mask, a face shield or goggles, and a paper gown.
- Operators will do their utmost to keep the same driver on the same run each day to support student comfort and contact tracing.
- Students and parents are reminded to greet their drivers with a smile, even from behind a mask. Bus drivers are a crucial part of the amazing front line service team who go to great lengths to keep our children safe and to support their educational journeys.

Seat Assignments

- Per provincial guidance, vehicle loading capacity will be at or close to normal. Students may be seated 2 or 3 per bench. **This is subject to change under direction of the Ministry of Education and Public Health.**
- STEO will make efforts to balance and distribute loads as evenly as possible to reduce vehicle loads where it can be done.
- The seat directly behind the driver will be left vacant, to the extent possible.
- Students who live in the same household are expected to sit together, while single riders will be grouped with classmates, to the extent possible.
- Seats will be clearly numbered or marked. Students must stay in their assigned seat during every ride. This reduces germ spread and facilitates contact tracing.
- For the start of the school year, students from Grades 1 through 12 will be directed by the driver to load the vehicle from back to front and to sit in the same seat for both morning and afternoon trips until an official seating plan can be established in collaboration with the school boards/schools.
- In some cases, Kindergarten students may be seated near the front for additional comfort and support. Parents/guardians of Kinder students will be required to meet their children at the bus stop, as usual.
- Seat assignments may change due to newly registered students; however, every attempt will be made to limit changes to seat assignments.

Loading and Unloading at the School

- Upon arriving at the school, students will unload from the front to the back, one seat at a time, while maintaining physical distance to the extent possible
- Students are recommended to use their personal hand-sanitizer after they get off the bus.
- Schools will direct students to make their way to the appropriate location for their classroom cohorts.
- At dismissal time, schools will do their best to maintain classroom cohorts until it is time to load school vehicles. Classroom cohorts may be separated into family cohorts upon loading, based on seat assignments.
- Students are reminded to return to their assigned seat and remain there for the entire trip. To reduce the risk of spreading germs and for contact tracing purposes, students are not permitted to change seats during the run to or from school.

Wheelchair Vehicles – Additional Considerations

- Drivers of wheelchair buses will be required to wear additional PPE to reduce the risk of germ spread. Drivers will wear a mask, a face shield or goggles, and a paper gown when securing individual students' wheelchairs. This is due to the proximity between the driver and the student during loading/unloading.
- The driver will use hand-sanitizer before and after assisting each student or wear disposable gloves.

- Assigned seating will occur by family or classroom cohort, to the extent possible. Seats will be clearly numbered or marked, and the driver will indicate in which seat each student should sit.
- Loading capacity will be at or near normal. Ambulatory students may be seated 2 or 3 per bench. All wheelchair positions will be used to secure students using wheelchairs. **This is subject to change under the direction of The Ministry of Education and Public Health.**
- The seat behind the driver will be left vacant, to the extent possible.
- STEO will make efforts to balance and distribute loads to reduce total vehicle ridership where it can be done.
- As students may be in close contact with others for prolonged periods of time, we highly recommend that students in grades JK to 3 wear non-medical face coverings/masks while traveling on school vehicles. Students in grades 4 and up are required to wear face coverings on school vehicles, as per the provincial school reopening guidelines. Exemptions can be made for students with breathing or cognitive difficulties, or for those who are unable to apply or remove a mask without assistance.

Students Riding in Vans

- Parents and school staff will wear a mask when securing students within the van.
- Parents may choose to use a non-scented, disinfectant wipe to clean any plastic or metal surfaces where their child will be sitting. Sprays will not be permitted.
- To support physical distancing, no students will be permitted to sit in the front seat of a van.
- As students may be in close contact with others for prolonged periods of time, we highly recommend that students in grades JK to 3 wear non-medical face coverings/masks while traveling on school vehicles. Students in grades 4 and up are required to wear face coverings on school vehicles, as per the provincial school reopening guidelines. Exemptions can be made for students with breathing or cognitive difficulties, or for those who are unable to apply or remove a mask without assistance.
- Assigned seating in vans will be arranged by family or classroom cohorts, to the extent possible, to a maximum of 5 student passengers. **This is subject to change under the direction of The Ministry of Education and Public Health.**

Ventilation on Buses

- Whenever feasible, bus windows will be open/partially open to increase vehicle ventilation. This practice will be weather dependent and implemented under the direction of the bus driver.

Cleaning of Vehicles

- A hard-surface disinfectant for use against COVID-19 as authorized by Health Canada will be utilized on high touch areas including handrails and seats in between each school run.
- Enhanced cleaning/disinfection to handrails, seats, seat belts, windows, walls below windows, steering wheel, driver controls and other parts that are commonly used and that may have been touched will also occur twice per day following the completion of each shift.

Alternative and Active Transportation

- Parents/guardians are encouraged to explore active travel opportunities (e.g. walking or cycling to school) or private transportation, where safe and feasible, to ease transportation demand, which may support physical distancing on school vehicles.
- It is recommended that students who can, use active transportation to get to school. Walking and rolling the whole way, or even part of the way (e.g. walk a block), can help to reduce traffic around the school. Try parking away from the school and having your children walk the last block or two. Take some time over the next few weeks to plan your route by finding the five-minute walk zone around your school.
- Walking to school is a great way for kids to be active and to connect with nature. Physical activity in the morning supports students to arrive at school energized and ready to learn.
- For more information on active transportation please visit Ontario Active School Travel Program <https://ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca>

#staysafe#staytuned

During these unprecedented times, feedback and engagement from parents/guardians, students, and the community are most welcome. Please follow STEO on social media for ongoing updates and reach out to us with your questions.

Contact Information:

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855-925-0022

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