



COVID-19 TRANSPORTATION RESPONSE PLAN

2021 - 2022



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Throughout the summer, STEO has collaborated with the Ministry of Education, our local school boards and school bus operators, neighbouring consortia, and local public health to once again develop a plan to mitigate risks associated with COVID-19 for transported students and school bus drivers for the upcoming 2021-2022 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 2021. 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 2021, we ask that they "opt out" as soon as possible. Families can opt out of transportation by completing the opt-out form specific to their school board, located in STEO's online Virtual Backpack [here](#). 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 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 identified, they are to be notified and will provide direction on next steps. The local Health Units receive all positive results of lab confirmed COVID-19.

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/school-screening/>. Click [here](#) for an overview of what to do if you've been exposed to COVID-19.

- 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 Units have 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

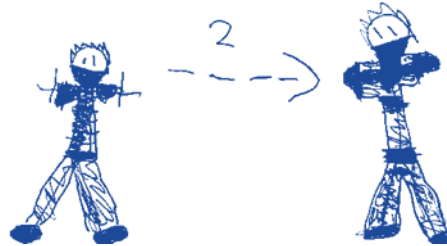
- STEO has prepared a video to help familiarize students and parents/guardians with COVID-19 related safety expectations on the school bus. The video is called *Spread Kindness Not Germs* and is available for viewing at this [link](#).
- Students should wash their hands thoroughly and/or use hand sanitizer prior to leaving for the bus stop.
- It is recommended that students carry hand sanitizer with them for personal use and sanitize their hands again just prior to 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, students in grades 1 through 12 are required to wear face coverings on school vehicles, per the 2021 – 2022 provincial school reopening guidelines. It is strongly encouraged, but not mandatory that students in Kindergarten wear non-medical face coverings/masks while traveling on school vehicles.
- Exemptions can be made for students with breathing or cognitive challenges, or for those who are unable to apply or remove a mask without assistance.
- Parents requesting a mask exemption for their child are required to contact their school principal with the details of their request. Schools will communicate mask exemptions to STEO.
- 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, as long as they are made of 2 or more layers of tightly woven fabric.
- While a face shield is not a substitute for a mask, it may be worn by a student with an exemption and provides some measure of protection.
- 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 an 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 collector locations) may be divided by STEO into multiple stops to provide for smaller groupings and to 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 occupy 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.

Your Awesome Bus Driver

- Ontario school bus drivers will participate in the Government of Ontario's COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy for the 2021 – 2022 school year. More information about the policy can be found [here](#).
- As students board the school vehicle, drivers will be wearing a mask and face shield, safety glasses or goggles. Parents/guardians may 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 eye protection (e.g., a face shield, goggles, or safety glasses) during the loading and unloading of students.
- If responding to a first aid event, drivers will wear gloves, a mask, a face shield, goggles or safety glasses, 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 facilitate their educational journeys.

Seating Plans

- Per provincial guidance, vehicle loading capacity will be at or close to full capacity. Students may be seated 2 or 3 per bench. This is subject to change under the direction of the Ministry of Education and Public Health.
- STEO will make efforts to balance and distribute loads as evenly as possible to reduce total vehicle ridership 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 may 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.
- 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 Personal Protective Equipment (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, students in grades 1 through 12 are required to wear face coverings on school vehicles, as per the 2021 – 2022 provincial school reopening guidelines. It is strongly encouraged, but not mandatory that students in Kindergarten wear non-medical face coverings/masks while traveling on school vehicles.
- 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.
- Parents requesting a mask exemption for their child, are required to contact their school principal with the details of their request. Schools will communicate mask exemptions to STEO.

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, students in grades 1 through 12 are required to wear face coverings on school vehicles, as per the 2021 – 2022 provincial school reopening guidelines. It is strongly encouraged, but not mandatory that students in Kindergarten wear non-medical face coverings/masks while traveling on school vehicles.
- 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.
- Parents requesting a mask exemption for their student, are required to contact their school principal with the details of their request.
- 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.

- When environmental conditions allow, to facilitate airflow throughout the vehicle, drivers will:
 - Slightly open the driver side window
 - Crack open a few windows in the back
 - Where available and accessible, consider opening the back end of the roof hatch
 - Open the bus door and some additional windows between routes and during cleaning

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 summer 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>

#staysafestaytuned

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:

www.steo.ca	855-925-0022	transportation@steo.ca
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