

September 7, 2021

## **COVID-19 and School Bus Transportation: Information for Bus Operators and Drivers**

Your role in getting Huron and Perth students to and from school is vital to the health and well-being of our children. We thank you for your attention to safety every day, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when extra precautions are in place. Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) is working closely with school boards, schools, and the Huron Perth Student Transportation Service (HPSTS) to support a safe return to school.

The purpose of this memo is to inform you about the management of school bus-related COVID-19 cases and COVID-19 prevention measures.

### **COVID-19 cases related to bus transportation**

HPPH will investigate all COVID-19 cases. HPPH will give direction to the case and any high-risk contacts about isolation, testing, and returning to work/school. In most cases, fully vaccinated high-risk contacts who are symptom-free will not need to isolate, but should be tested.

*Note: Fully vaccinated means it has been 14 days or longer since the person has received their second dose of vaccine.*

#### How does HPPH determine if a bus driver or student is a high-risk contact?

If a case has used school transportation while they may have been infectious to others, HPPH will contact either HPSTS (for AMDSB and HPCDSB students) or the school principal (for private schools) to gather names, contact information, and seating charts for the relevant bus(es)/route(s). In most instances, HPPH will also contact the bus driver to collect and/or confirm information. HPPH will use this information to help determine who is a high-risk contact of the case.

#### What questions does HPPH ask the bus driver?

HPPH will talk to the bus driver to determine if there has been a high-risk exposure for the driver and/or the students. The driver will be asked about the use of personal protective equipment (i.e. medical mask and eye protection), proximity to students, vaccination status and other relevant questions.

To determine if any or all students are high-risk contacts, HPPH will ask the bus driver about the following prevention measures:

#### **Seating**

Students should have an assigned seat and a record of the seating plan should be kept to assist with contact tracing in the event of a student or driver contracting COVID-19. Strict adherence to a seating plan is critical to HPPH's ability to accurately determine close contacts. HPPH looks at where the case was seated, who shared their seat, and who sat within two meters of the case. Our goal is to isolate only those who have been in close contact with the case. However, the entire bus (including the driver) may have to isolate if the seating plan has not been followed or information is incomplete and/or inconsistent.

Students who live in the same household or are in the same classroom cohort should be seated together, when possible.

The seat directly behind the school bus driver should remain empty to maintain physical distancing, when possible.

### **Masks**

School bus drivers, school bus monitors and student aides must wear **medical-grade** masks and eye protection (i.e. face shields). Eye protection for drivers should not interfere with the safe operation of vehicles and is intended to protect drivers during close contact with students, such as during boarding and exiting.

Students in grades 1 to 12 are required to wear a non-medical mask/face covering in school vehicles, unless they have an exemption due to a medical condition or special need.

Students in kindergarten are encouraged but not required to wear masks on student transportation.

### **Hand hygiene**

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60-90% alcohol content) should be available on vehicles. Hand hygiene should be performed frequently.

### **Cleaning and disinfecting**

Frequently touched surfaces (for example, handrails and seatbacks) should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice daily using an approved disinfectant. Approved disinfectants have a drug identification number (DIN) from Health Canada.

### **Ventilation**

When the bus is in operation, windows should be opened when feasible to increase ventilation.

We understand that talking to a HPPH employee and answering questions may cause some anxiety or concern. Please be assured that HPPH is here to support you as we work through the situation. We appreciate your willingness to work with us to help protect both your own and your students' health and wellbeing.

As a reminder, please continue to complete the provincial school screening before reporting to work each day, and to stay home if you are unwell. The online screening tool is found at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>. Your employer may also have specific policies in place regarding screening.

### **For more information**

- [COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for schools \(2021-2022\)](#) – Ontario Ministry of Education
- [Health and Safety Guidance during COVID-19 for Student Transportation Employers](#) – Public Services Health and Safety Association
- [Federal Guidance for School Bus Operations during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) – Government of Canada
- If you have questions, please contact Huron Perth Public Health at 1-888-221-2133.