

ACF Administration for Children and Families	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	
	1. Log No. ACF-IM-HS-22-01	2. Issuance Date: 02/01/2021
	3. Originating Office: Office of Head Start	
	4. Key Words: Transportation Services; Vehicles; COVID-19 Pandemic	

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

**TO:** All Head Start and Early Head Start Agencies and Delegate Agencies

**SUBJECT:** Head Start Transportation Services and Vehicles During the COVID-19 Pandemic

INFORMATION:

School buses and allowable alternate vehicles ([Terms, 45 CFR §1305.2](#)) are generally the safest mode of transportation for children. They are also necessary for many children and families to participate in Head Start programs. Implementing safe practices is essential when providing transportation services during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

When making decisions about transporting children, programs should consult local health officials and other state and local authorities, to the extent feasible. These authorities can assess the current level of mitigation needed based on levels of COVID-19 community transmission and the capacities of local public health care systems. Staff should take steps to ensure they mitigate the risk with respect to school buses and allowable alternate vehicles. The steps Head Start programs take to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 should be the same whether the program is providing its own transportation or relying on contracted or school district-provided transportation.

Explore strategies below for keeping children and staff safe from COVID-19 in vehicles.

*Support Transportation Staff Safety*

Encourage these strategies to keep transportation staff and children safe.

**1. Require staff members who are sick to stay home,** particularly those who have tested positive or are showing COVID-19 [symptoms](#). Sick staff members should not return to work until [the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met](#), in consultation with health care providers and state and local health departments. Staff who have recently had [close contact](#) with a person with COVID-19 should also stay home and monitor their health. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has [recommendations sick people should follow](#).

**2. Send sick staff home.** Send home staff experiencing symptoms during work hours.

**3. Wear masks.** Make [masks](#) available and ensure their use. The CDC requires the use of masks by passengers over 2 years of age on public transport, including school buses, except for stated exemptions and exclusions. Vehicle operators and bus monitors must wear a mask unless they cannot safely wear one because of a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or when they are either eating or drinking.

Masks [should not be placed on](#) young children under age 2 or anyone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. Children age 2 and up must wear a mask unless they are either eating or drinking; napping; cannot safely wear a mask because of a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act; or when a child's health care provider advises an alternative face covering to accommodate the child's special health care needs ([Safety practices, 45 CFR §1302.47](#)).

**4. Keep hands clean.** Make available and ensure the use of hand hygiene supplies, per CDC recommendations. Proper [hand hygiene](#) is an important infection control measure. Staff and children should wash their hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Supervise children when they use hand sanitizer to prevent ingestion.

- Key times to clean hands include:
  - Before, during, and after preparing food or drinks
  - Before and after eating or handling food
  - After using the toilet
  - After coming in contact with bodily fluid
  - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
  - After handling garbage
- Additional times to clean hands include:
  - Before and after work shifts
  - Before and after work breaks
  - After touching frequently touched surfaces, such as handrails
  - After putting on, touching, or removing masks

#### *Use of Head Start Vehicles to Provide Transportation Services for Children*

Encourage these strategies to ensure Head Start vehicles are safe places for transportation staff and children.

**1. Follow transportation strategies.** As described in the section above, make masks and hand washing supplies available. Encourage their use.

**2. Improve ventilation.** Keep vehicle windows open as much as is safe and weather and air quality allow.

**3. Conduct health checks.** Conduct a health check of all children and staff before they board the vehicle. Do not transport individuals with a fever of 100.4 F (38 C) or above or who show other signs of illness. Do not transport individuals who have been in close contact (within 6 feet) of

someone who has tested positive for, or is showing symptoms of, COVID-19. Consider training and equipping bus monitors to use a non-contact thermometer.

**4. Distance children from each other.** The following suggestions will help reduce the amount of contact that children have with each other when riding in Head Start vehicles:

- Load children into the back of the bus first to reduce contact.
- Position children as far apart as possible with one child per bench. If children are coming from the same home, they may sit together. Reroute or stagger bus runs, as needed, to keep group size small and minimize potential exposure between children.
- If possible, keep class groups together on bus runs to minimize potential exposure between different groups of children.

**5. Help children understand physical distancing.** Use visible cues, such as stickers on the floors, to guide children and offer gentle prompts to help them understand the new protocols. Remember that some young children may not understand the need for physical distancing. They rely on adults for their safety and care.

**6. Wear gloves.** Staff should use gloves if touching surfaces contaminated by body fluids.

#### *Clean Vehicles Between Each Use*

Programs should routinely clean vehicles at the end of each day. If a child or adult who rode the bus is reported to have tested positive for or has symptoms of COVID-19, clean and disinfect the bus before using it again.

- For hard and non-porous surfaces inside the vehicle (e.g., hard seats, arm rests, door handles, light and air controls, doors, windows), clean with detergent or soap and water if the surfaces are visibly dirty.
- For seatbelts and other child safety restraints, programs must employ methods and products that are effective on COVID-19 and safe for use with the restraint system, particularly seatbelt webbing. Chlorine or ammonia-based solutions may cause deterioration of safety restraint components and cannot be used. For cleaning guidelines, consult the vehicle or restraint system manufacturer.
- For soft or porous surfaces (e.g., fabric seats), remove any visible contamination and clean with appropriate cleaners indicated for use on these surfaces.

Refer to the [CDC](#) for additional information around COVID-19 safety precautions, particularly:

- [Early Childhood Education and Child Care Programs](#)
- [Mask Requirement](#)
- [Cleaning Your Facility](#)

Find relevant tips in the U.S. Department of Education [COVID-19 Handbook: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools](#).

## *COVID-19 Updates*

Programs should make decisions based on current experiences with the staff, children, and families your program. Additionally, check state and local health department notices daily about COVID-19 transmission and mitigation levels in the area and adjust operations accordingly. Consider using the CDC's [COVID Data Tracker](#). As community conditions continue to change, some programs may need to adjust their program operations and services. Check the [OHS COVID-19 Updates](#) page for more information.

Based on local data and guidance or directives, programs should be prepared to stagger routes, reduce bus runs, or end bus runs temporarily. Programs should engage staff and families when making changes to transportation policies.

Please stay in touch with your program specialist as you plan and provide program services.

Thank you for your work on behalf of children and families.

/ Dr. Bernadine Futrell /

Dr. Bernadine Futrell  
Director  
Office of Head Start