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Transport and Allowances

Education, Participation and Skills

Plymouth City Council

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Please ask for: School Transport

Date 24 January 2022

Dear Parent/Guardian

Further to the most recent up-dated government guidance about self-isolation periods, I am writing to give you a further update on how this will impact your child’s school transport provision.

This guidance confirms

* a person (child or adult) who tested positive is now able to lateral flow test (LFT) at days 5 and 6 and if both those tests are negative, the person can cease self-isolation at day 6.
* those who leave self-isolation on or after day 6 are strongly advised to limit close contact with other people in crowded or poorly ventilated spaces and minimise contact with anyone who is at higher risk of severe illness if infected with COVID-19

As you know from previous letters, we have asked that windows in the vehicles are kept open at all times. School Transport is crowded and many of the child/young people/Passenger Assistants and drivers were in the clinically extremely vulnerable groups.

We have a duty of care for all passengers, the health, safety and welfare of everyone is our first priority. We cannot reduce the numbers of passengers travelling in each vehicle, we are asking for windows to remain open at all times, many of our passengers are at higher medical risk. The advice from the Health and Safety and Public Health is that School Transport will have to continue with the 10 day self-isolation period for all passengers.

We and our contractors have been trying to recruit more temporary staff to cover both Passenger Assistant and driver absences and despite everyone’s best efforts, we have not been able to attract enough to cover our current levels of sickness and COVID self-isolation periods. This means that with immediate effect, if a Passenger Assistant or driver is unable to work due to either a positive test or is a close contact for someone at home who has tested positive (School Transport is designated a close contact environment and PCC policy states close contacts have to self-isolate) we will have to cancel transport for the same period they have to remain in self-isolation (up to 10 days). We have tried to avoid having to do this and I know it’s only a few weeks into the new term but we do not have any other options available to us, we just do not have the relief staff available nor the resources within the team.

This policy affects all passengers, if your child tests positive for COVID they will not able to travel on school transport for the self-isolation period of 10 days; I do understand and appreciate they can return to school at day 6 if they have tested negative on an LFT on days 5 and 6, but regret they cannot return to transport until day 11. When you contact the office to cancel transport for your child who has tested positive, please confirm this is the reason and we will agree with you the date transport will resume.

Due to the current National shortage of drivers and PAs, we are not able to provide alternative transport whilst the transport is cancelled. We are sorry if you/your child is impacted by this and if during the time the transport is cancelled if you can take your child to/from school yourself, we can pay you a petrol allowance/reimbursement of bus tickets to do this. Please email school.transport@plymouth.gov.uk and we will email details on how to claim the reimbursement. You can also telephone the school transport team for more information: 01752 308770.

If you would like to contact/speak with a member of the team about this letter, you can do so using the email and telephone number given above. Further information can be found on the School Transport web page: [www.plymouth.gov.uk/schooltransport](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/schooltransport)

Having spoken with a few parents since the start of term, I completely understand your frustration and understand that you feel our policy differs from the government guidance. However, I would reassure you that this is not the case. It is just that the full guidance is not published within the press, they only confirm the main changes, and do not go into the full details. We are following this policy to try and protect everyone travelling on school transport as much as possible. I would also like to confirm the following:

* Children and young people aged 11 and over should still wear a face covering on dedicated transport if they can, this does not of course apply to those who are exempt from wearing a face covering on public transport
* All passenger assistants and drivers will wear face masks
* We are continuing to maximise the ventilation of fresh air (from outside the vehicle) on dedicated transport, particularly through opening windows and ceiling vents. Drivers are following instructions when adhering to this advice and we would ask that your children are adequately dressed for the weather. Heating will be operational on the transport but the fresh air will make it a little cooler than normal on the vehicles
* Hand-sanitiser continues to be available for all students use on the vehicles, please encourage your child to use it if they can without assistance
* Additional cleaning of vehicles will take place

Thank you for your ongoing understanding in these difficult times and I am very sorry for any impact this may have on your family.

Yours faithfully

Ming Zhang

Service Director for Education