



COVID-19 Safety Protocols for School Transportation Operators

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School bus operators play a critical role in ensuring trips to and from school are as safe as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can help keep kids in class this school year!

How is the Risk of COVID-19 Assessed on a School Bus?

- When an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 has ridden a school bus during their contagious period, public health must assess the potential risk of exposure for other individuals who were on the bus during that time.
- Public health's risk assessment considers location of students on the bus (their seat), length of time of exposure (how long they rode the bus), ventilation, use of masks, vaccination status of students around them, and other measures as applicable.
- Identifying where a student sits on the bus is a key component of the risk assessment process.

Seating Plans

- Seating plans must include assigned seats. An organized record of the seating plan should be available to assist with contact tracing if a student or driver tests positive for COVID-19.
- To reduce unnecessary high-risk contacts (students who are at high risk of contracting COVID-19 due to an exposure to a case), students who live in the same household or are in the same classroom cohort should be seated together.
- Whenever possible, the seat directly behind the school bus driver should remain empty to maintain physical distancing.

Why are Seating Plans so Important?

- When an individual who tests positive has taken school bus transportation during their contagious period, public health must identify people (including those on the bus) who have had close contact with the individual while they were contagious.
- When students consistently follow a reliable seating plan on the bus, public health can confidently identify who has been close to the contagious person.
- When there is no seating plan, or when a seating plan is not followed consistently (changing seats throughout the ride, etc.), public health needs to err on the side of caution and identify **all students on the bus as high-risk contacts**.
- **This means that all students on the bus who are not fully vaccinated will be required to stay home from school for a minimum of 10 days.**
- Students in Ontario have been absent from in person learning for approximately 26 weeks since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- These absences impact children's academic achievement and lead to learning losses and negative impacts on mental health and well-being.

What Should a Seating Plan Include?

- For a template seating plan, visit <https://hpepublichealth.ca/bus-seating-chart-template/>

Establishing and enforcing a consistent seating plan is essential to reduce potential exposures for students who ride the bus, and to help reduce unnecessary absences from school.

More information can be found at the [Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools](#), or the [Health and Safety Guidance During COVID-19 for Student Transportation Employers](#) and [Federal Guidance for School Bus Operations during the COVID-19](#).