

Wisconsin School Transportation Considerations for schools reopening from COVID-19

The school bus is often the student's first point of contact with the school in the morning and the last point of contact in the evening. Thus, school districts should pay particular attention to protocols used in student transportation to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus and protect both students and employees.

The following are examples of considerations that school districts may consider during the COVID-19 pandemic. This document is meant to supplement the DPI Interim COVID-19 Transportation Guidance that has been released. For most school districts it is not logistically nor fiscally possible to physically distance students on a school bus. In most cases only 10-12 students would be able to go on a bus and it would take 2-4 times more buses, drivers and money to implement the CDC recommendations. When physical distancing is not feasible on a school bus, cloth face masks and other mitigation strategies should be considered.

This document was developed by the Wisconsin School Bus Association and Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials to assist school districts in finding ways to mitigate the risks of operating their school transportation systems during this pandemic. These precautions are not required by law and may not be feasible for some districts. School districts should work with their transportation departments, school bus contractors, local health department, insurance company and attorney to determine the mitigation plan they will implement for their school transportation system. It is extremely important that school districts plan, problem solve and coordinate these considerations with their transportation departments and / or school bus contractors.

Communication

School Districts should communicate their pandemic transportation plan to parents, guardians, students and the community. This should include the school bus mitigation plan addressing such issues as:

- The cleaning and disinfecting schedule
- PPE recommendations for drivers and students
- Any changes to bus routes or school pick up and drop off procedures
- The expectations for students while riding the bus and at the bus stop.

This information will allow parents/guardians to make an informed decision if their children will ride the school bus when school starts. Schools should contact all parents/guardians to determine which students will be riding the bus and which ones will not. Students and parents/guardians will be a crucial part of helping ensure safety and mitigating risk while utilizing school transportation.

School Bus Preparation and Disinfecting

- **Inspect all buses and vehicles used to transport students for cleanliness and safety.**
 - Vehicle safety inspections are current.
 - Scheduled service and preventative maintenance is completed or still on schedule to be completed.
- **Inventory, collect, and purchase enough cleaning equipment and hygiene supplies with the understanding that buses will be disinfected on a more frequent basis. Use products recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), local health departments and/or risk management professionals. Some of these products are listed on the following website from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19>**

- **Thoroughly clean and disinfect all school buses and vehicles used to transport students.**
 - Passenger areas are thoroughly swept and clear of dirt, litter or loose material
 - Create a cleaning and disinfecting schedule for the school buses that will allow time for the disinfecting products to dry and any fumes to dissipate before students are allowed on the bus.
 - Clean and disinfect all commonly touched surfaces within the entry, passenger and driver's areas of the bus or transport vehicle, including car seats, seat belts, booster seats and harnesses.
 - Ensure proper ventilation when cleaning and disinfecting the vehicle.
 - Document each time the vehicle is disinfected
 - When feasible, wait 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting a school bus/vehicle used to transport students that had a passenger, or a driver test positive for COVID-19. If 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible. Affected buses can be used immediately after disinfecting.
 - Ensure that cleaning supplies kept on buses are appropriately labeled and stored so that students do not have access to them.
 - Ensure that cleaning supplies used are appropriately labeled so that employees are aware of the chemicals being used. Ensure Safety Data Sheets are available for all chemical products in use.

Modifications to Transportation System

- **Highly Recommend masks, cloth face covers or face shields for passengers, drivers & aides.**
- **Consider installing hand sanitizer stations inside each bus.**
- **Consider limiting the number of students scheduled at a bus stop.**
- **Consider prohibiting eating, drinking (unless medically required) or chewing gum on the bus.**
- **Post signs in each bus that illustrate the COVID-19 related Rider Expectations and Safety Precautions (How to Stop the Spread, Proper Hand Washing, Covering Your Cough). Parents/guardians should receive a copy.**
- **When feasible consider:**
 - Assigning drivers to a single bus and a specific route. Take other measures to minimize the number of drivers who use a vehicle.
 - Limiting students to one route and prohibit practices such as being picked up and dropped off in different locations, using different routes.
 - Staggering drop-off and pick-up processes and locations where possible at schools.
 - Staggering bus route times to align with staggered school start times.
 - Create and post assigned seating expectations on each bus. Consider the following examples:
 - Formal seating chart to assist with seating assignments and any infection tracing needs
 - Assign Students by Grade or
 - By Bus Stop
 - First student on takes rear most available seat (inbound)
 - Last student on departs first at school (inbound)
 - For outbound, students organized at school:
 - Assign students by grade or
 - By route stop order (in reverse)
 - Last stop students boarding first and taking rear most available seat
 - Next to last stop students next and so on
 - First stop students un-boarding first and so on

- **Reduce the numbers of students on the bus at any given time:**
 - Anticipate more parents/guardians will choose to drive their students to and from school instead of having them ride the school bus due to COVID-19. Consider contacting all parents/guardians to determine which students will be riding the bus and which ones will not. This may help better balance ridership among all bus routes.
 - Consider:
 - Adding additional bus routes, if possible.
 - Transporting medically fragile students in separate vehicles.
 - Reserving a specific seat for a medically fragile child that is not used for any other student during the day, with special precautions for disinfecting.
 - Eliminating Student Transfer Points
 - Can students be taken directly to their school? Making stops at multiple schools?
 - Can drivers be exchanged as opposed to loading students onto a different bus?
 - Work with local police / local government to see if they can provide appropriate crossing guards and patrols in neighborhoods surrounding the school buildings for the additional students that may choose to walk or ride their bike to school.
 - Work with school administrators and police to determine if new traffic patterns are needed around the schools to accommodate the increased parent and foot traffic. This may include:
 - New loading and unloading locations or procedures for buses
 - New loading and unloading locations or procedures for cars (parents/guardians).
 - The need for additional staff supervision
 - Coordinating buses running late due to COVID-19 cleaning procedures
- **Ensure ventilation systems operate properly while students are on the bus. Increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows, roof hatches or using fans or other methods.**
 - Temperature and weather conditions will dictate when this is possible.
 - Do not open windows if they pose a safety risk to passengers or employees, or other vulnerable individuals such as students with asthma.

Employee Training

- **Ensure drivers and maintenance/cleaning staff are properly trained in the use of the tools and products related to cleaning of buses and other transportation vehicles.**
- **Ensure drivers and maintenance/cleaning staff are properly trained in topics related to the pandemic. Examples of training topics should include:**
 - Information about COVID-19, how it spreads, symptoms, and risk of exposure.
 - Employees understanding the difference between allergies, regular sickness and COVID-19 symptoms.
 - What will be done when a student or driver tests positive for COVID-19.
 - How to properly fit, wear and dispose of the PPE they will be using (masks, gloves, clothing, etc.)
 - The appropriate methods for cleaning and disinfecting the high touch areas of the bus, including proper ventilation.
 - Techniques for mitigating exposure such as:
 - Using gloves when handling and disposing of trash
 - Avoiding touching surfaces often touched by passengers
 - Avoid touching your face
 - Proper Hand Washing Techniques
 - How to Properly Cover Coughs and Sneezes

Transportation Operations - Management or Routing Departments

- **Conduct assessments of transportation operations (offices, dispatch, driver's rooms, bathrooms, maintenance areas) to identify COVID-19 mitigation strategies that will be put in place.**
 - Create a cleaning and disinfecting schedule for all areas of operations. Document each time the area is disinfected.
 - Proper consideration and steps taken (including closing areas) for physical distancing (i.e., driver room, dispatch areas, conference areas, etc.). Attempt to mitigate places that employees will congregate in groups. Consider:
 - How and where will employees report to work (check-in / timeclock)?
 - How will they be notified of information they need about their route?
 - What is the procedure when a driver or aide wants to talk with the manager / supervisor?
 - Provide hand sanitizing stations for employees.
 - Highly Recommend PPE, such as masks, cloth face covers or face shields for all employees.
 - Rearrange workstations to ensure they are properly separated at least 6 ft apart.
 - Consider placing barriers between workstations if they cannot be separated 6 ft apart.

Extra-Curricular Trips

- Consider having school personnel and/or students load and unload all equipment so the driver does not need to assist. The driver still has the responsibility to make sure the items are properly stored and secured.
- Consider having all riders sit in the same seat to and from the event.
- While the driver waits for the contest to be completed, it is recommended that they wipe down all the high touch areas of the bus. Should they need to eat, it is recommended that they bring their own food and not enter any local restaurants.

Other Considerations

- School Bus Drivers should not be responsible for taking the temperature of students.
- Additional time will be needed to route or reroute, assign or reassign buses if a district chooses to use more buses to be able to transport fewer students per bus. This will create additional operational costs for buses, driver wages, benefits, and fuel.
- Who will pay for the additional items that may be needed due to COVID-19?
 - Time needed to pay employees to clean and disinfect buses each day.
 - Disinfecting products – wipes, disinfectants, masks, gloves, etc.
 - Hand Sanitizer dispenser and product if they are installed on each bus
 - Additional Supervision, if needed before and after school.
 - Costs associated with adding bus routes, cutting bus routes or going less than 5 days per week.
- Are PPE, hand sanitizer and disinfecting products available?

Definitions

Cleaning removes germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces or objects. Cleaning works by using soap (or detergent) and water to physically remove germs from surfaces. This process does not necessarily kill germs, but by removing them, it lowers their numbers and the risk of spreading infection.

Disinfecting kills germs on surfaces or objects. Disinfecting works by using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces or objects. This process does not necessarily clean dirty surfaces or remove germs, but by killing germs on a surface after cleaning, it can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

Sanitizing lowers the number of germs on surfaces or objects to a safe level, as judged by public health standards or requirements. This process **works by either cleaning or disinfecting** surfaces or objects to lower the risk of spreading infection.