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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 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 help assess the current level of mitigation needed based on levels of COVID-19 community transmission and the capacities of local public healthcare 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 risk should be the same whether the program is providing its own transportation or relying on contracted or school district-provided transportation.

Support Transportation Staff Safety

- Strongly encourage 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 healthcare 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](#).

- Send home staff experiencing symptoms during work hours.
- Assign [vulnerable workers](#) alternate duties that minimize their contact with children, families, and other employees, if possible.
- Make available and ensure the use of [cloth face coverings](#) per CDC recommendations. Vehicle operators should wear a cloth face covering only if it will not interfere with safe driving. Cloth face coverings [should not be placed on](#) children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- 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:

- Before and after eating, preparing, or handling food and drinks
- 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:

- Before and after work shifts and breaks
- After touching frequently touched surfaces, such as handrails
- After putting on, touching, or removing cloth face coverings

Use of Head Start Vehicles During Periods of Service Interruption

Based on public health guidance, programs may temporarily stop regular program operations, including center-based, family child care, and home-based services. During this time, to the extent possible, employees should continue to engage families and deliver critical services remotely. Programs should continue to provide children with supplies they would receive normally through the program, such as diapers, formula, snacks, meals, and learning supplies.

When programs use agency vehicles to transport food and supplies, they should:

- Minimize contact between vehicle operators and other staff, children, and families as they load and deliver supplies.
- Make available and ensure the use of cloth face coverings and hand hygiene supplies, as described above. Ensure staff maintain at least 6 feet (about two adult arms' length) between each other and families receiving supplies.

Use of Head Start Vehicles to Provide Transportation Services for Children

For programs that are currently operating:

- Minimize contact between vehicle operators and other staff. If possible, stay at least 6 feet from other people.
- Make available and ensure the use of cloth face coverings and hand hygiene supplies as described above.
- 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.
- Position children as far apart as possible, preferably 6 feet apart, with one child per bench and no consecutive rows. If children are coming from the same home, they may sit together. If possible, ensure children sit 6 feet away from the vehicle operator.
- 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.
- 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 young children do not understand the need for physical distancing. They rely on adults for their safety and care.
- Vehicle operators should avoid touching surfaces often touched by bus passengers, to the extent possible. Staff should use gloves if touching surfaces contaminated by body fluids.

Fluctuating Service

Programs should check state and local health department notices daily about COVID-19 transmission and mitigation levels in the area and adjust operations accordingly. As community conditions continue to change, some programs may need to adjust their program operations and services.

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.

Clean Vehicles Between Each Use

Programs should [clean and disinfect](#) vehicles between each use pursuant to CDC's recommended process using [products that are U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19](#). Be sure to thoroughly clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces. Ensure [safe and correct use](#) of cleaning and disinfection products, including storing products securely away from children. Cleaning products should not be used near children. Staff should ensure there is adequate ventilation when using these products to prevent children or themselves from inhaling toxic vapors.

- 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, prior to disinfectant application.

- 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, particularly:

- [Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K–12 Schools and Child Care Programs](#)
- [Guidance for Child Care Programs That Remain Open](#)
- [Child Care Decision Tool](#)
- [Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes](#)
- [What Bus Transit Operators Need to Know About COVID-19](#)

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. Deborah Bergeron /

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