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4th August 2020

Dear Parent/Guardian,

OUR COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS

With schools returning in September, we've had a number of queries about the Covid-19 precautions we've put in place.

Naturally, the safety of our passengers and staff is our number one priority. Though most of our school services finished in late March when schools closed down, we've been running a limited network of local bus services throughout the pandemic, transporting key workers, and those with no other means of reaching the shops or important medical appointments. So, we've fine-tuned and developed our COVID-19 precautions as medical and government guidance has changed, and our systems and experience mean you can be confident we're clean, safe and ready to go when schools and colleges return.

Government guidance is fundamentally different for those services only carrying school or college students, and local bus services which are open to the general public as well as students. This says that on 'closed door' services (i.e. those restricted to school & college students) no social distancing is required, and therefore every seat can be occupied. Similarly, face coverings are not a legal requirement, but are strongly recommended for those over 11. We will be requiring all students to wear a face covering while on the bus, unless covered by an exemption.

On local bus services open to the general public, face coverings must legally be worn (although there are certain medical and other exemptions), and social distancing rules apply. Bus travel is made safer by a number of mitigating factors, and thus whilst we encourage passengers to sit 2m away from others if possible, on fuller buses we simply limit capacity so that only one seat in every pair is occupied (unless travelling in a social bubble or family group). Where this applies, we will be working with local authorities and schools to provide additional vehicles where they are required to ensure that sufficient capacity is provided to meet demand.

As a temporary measure, some services which normally carry small numbers of the general public may be changed to 'scholars only' services for the duration of the pandemic to ensure we can carry all students who need to travel. Alternatively, we may reserve a small number of seats in one section of the bus for non-school passengers. We will keep our website www.stephensonsofessex.com updated so check back regularly. Similarly, when pass sales approach the vehicle capacity we will cease to offer daily cash fares. Therefore, to ensure your son/daughter can use the bus service we highly recommend you buy a termly or annual pass now.

In general terms, we've adopted a number of measures to help keep our passengers safe on buses. Some of these are listed below:

1. We have fitted a perspex screen on the driver's cab door to avoid the risk of virus transmission between passengers and driver
2. Drivers have all been issued with personal face masks, gloves, hand sanitiser and anti-bacterial wipes. They are not legally required to wear a mask, but issuing them means they can do so by personal choice.
3. We have heightened our daily cleaning procedures, which now include as well as sweeping and mopping, anti-bacterial treatment of poles, bells and other touchpoints, anti-bacterial treatment of the cab area and windows/ledges, and most recently, a 'fogging' system which coats the whole vehicle interior in a fine anti-bacterial mist. These procedures are carried out every night. In addition, the drivers can use their anti-bacterial wipes to clean the cab area should they change over during the day with another driver.
4. The two seats immediately behind the driver (where applicable) have been marked out of use, as have any facing seats less than 2 metres apart. The majority of seats are of course forward-facing, so every passenger is facing the back of someone else's head – considerably reducing transmission risk.
5. We encourage student passengers to purchase a termly pass where possible. Other customers are asked to pay by card rather than cash if possible. However, we do still accept cash for single and return journeys, although this will cease when pass sales get near to vehicle capacity and be notified via our website..
6. We advise customers to wash their hands or use hand sanitiser before and after every journey. We have NOT fitted dispensers to buses – our risk assessment (which is broadly based on industry standards) shows that this encourages people to congregate around the dispenser, and also represents a slip hazard should it spill onto the floor.
7. On local bus routes we advise only one passenger per double seat unless in a family group/social bubble, and sitting by the window. This gives a revised vehicle capacity of 45-60%. As noted above this does not apply to dedicated school/college services.
8. We ask all customers to sit apart if possible, board one at a time, cough or sneeze hygienically, don't travel unwell, wash their hands, and wear a face covering (compulsory on public transport subject to exemptions). Our website also has links to the latest .gov guidance.

I'm delighted that we've received 'Good to Go' accreditation reflecting the policies and procedures we've put in place, and I hope that this, together with the information above, gives you confidence that your son or daughter will be safely welcomed back on board our buses in September.

Yours sincerely,

Bill Hiron

Managing Director



Stephensons of Essex Ltd