



# Guidance for Operating Essential Journeys during COVID-19 Emergency

*Last updated: 26 March*

## Introduction

As the situation around COVID-19, develops we want to make sure that our members can access the guidance they need to understand any actions or precautions they might need to take.

**You can always find the most up to date guidance from CTA at [ctauk.org/covid19-guidance/](https://ctauk.org/covid19-guidance/) where you can also download it as a PDF.**

This document looks at how the current guidance from the Government impacts on community transport providing essential journeys they may have to undertake. A key role of many community transport providers is to take its passengers to medical appointments and enable access to healthcare locations. The current recommendations for social distancing and self-isolation will have a direct impact on if and how these journeys can be made. We understand that the NHS is cancelling many routine appointments, and this should in turn reduce demand on community transport. However, the sector will clearly still have an important role to play.

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## Essential journeys

The current rule is that everyone should stay at home to help stop the spread of the virus. Community transport providers may be asked to provide a service in respect of one of the four exceptions to this rule – shopping, exercise, medical or care need, or travel to work if this work cannot be undertaken at home. Of these, attending a pre-arranged and confirmed medical appointment is likely to be the main, if not the only, reason for an operator to provide service for an essential journey.

It may be difficult to differentiate between an essential journey, and one that is merely very important for your passenger. We suggest you discuss this with passengers and establish whether, the passenger's needs can be met in some other way. The general policy should be to refuse any but

the most vital journeys. The majority of passengers will undoubtedly be cancelling bookings themselves.

Community transport providers need to ensure that they commit to undertaking essential journeys only, and develop a way of prioritising or triaging which trips must be made. Essential journeys will almost invariably be for non-routine healthcare purposes, but in a small number of circumstances could encompass trips for other purposes. We suggest that rather than stating these restrictions directly in your social media and marketing content, that you still encourage booking enquiries and judge each transport request on its own terms. It is important that passengers do not think you have simply closed down, even if what you can offer them might be significantly restricted. The contact and conversation will be important.

For journeys that you are considering making, bear in mind the following:

- The NHS is cancelling all but essential visits to hospitals and medical units, so you should experience a reduction in demand. Any other kind of appointment, such as dentist, chiropody, physio, relaxation & wellbeing classes etc. will almost certainly be cancelled.
- It is possible that your customers may be unaware if any scheduled appointments for them have been cancelled, or they may have forgotten or neglected to pass this information on to you. We suggest that in cases of all existing or regular bookings that the passenger should be prompted to confirm that the appointment is definitely going ahead the day before with the hospital, GP or clinic before you authorise a driver to set out. (If the passenger is confused or cannot get this confirmation, you could offer to call yourself, although the hospital may not be able to assist due to confidentiality rules.).
- For new requests for visits to GPs, passengers need to be aware of current measures to limit physical visits (each GP will have posted information on these restrictions) and only undertake the journey if the surgery has requested that the passenger should attend.
- Many dental and chiropody practices have closed or are responding to emergencies only – they may not have had time to contact all their customers with existing appointments. If in doubt, ensure that passengers check in advance.
- Many medical units and GP surgeries have restricted (or made adjustments to) communal waiting facilities – in some cases patients are being asked to wait outside of the building until called. This may present problems regarding dropping off, and the extent to which some passengers might need accompanying on site – especially in foul weather. This raises questions around social distancing for the driver and the passenger whilst on site. It is worth checking with the location to see if any changes have been made that the driver needs to be aware of.
- For pharmacy needs, in almost all cases this can be done without a visit to a GP or pharmacy (see details below) and you could offer to collect and deliver if the pharmacy cannot undertake to do this. [Please see the CTA guidance for making home deliveries here.](#)

It is worth bearing in mind that passengers may request trips to other locations without realising the extent to which shops, offices, and amenities are restricted or closed. It is worth keeping up to date on the situation in your local area so that you can signpost passengers to alternative means of satisfying their needs.

Passengers attending for a medical appointment may request a stop for another purpose on the way back. Unless that purpose would have counted as an essential journey in its own right this request should be politely refused. This includes breaking the journey so that the driver can do shopping for the passenger whilst they stay in the vehicle. This would raise unnecessary risk of infection transfer from a third party to the driver whilst shopping and thence onto the passenger. It is far safer to use a home delivery service where hygiene can be controlled. Drivers should be instructed not to agree to any unplanned variation to the journey.

## Passenger Care

General guidance indicates that those at highest risk are:

- People aged 70 years or over, regardless of general health.
- People of any age who have an underlying health condition<sup>1</sup> – these are extremely vulnerable ‘Shielded’ individuals, who will have received a letter advising them of what precautions they should take. Shielded persons have been “strongly advised to stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact for a period of at least 12 weeks”<sup>2</sup> Individuals in the shielded category are eligible for the newly implemented home support service<sup>3</sup>.
- Women who are pregnant.

This should be borne in mind for any activities that involve staff, volunteers and passengers who may fall into these risk categories. In general, we would suggest you immediately stand down any staff or volunteers in these categories, however much they want to continue providing a service.

It will be critical to understand the situation of each customer, and create categories e.g.:

- a) Socially Self-Isolated (social distancing) – but no symptoms
- b) Self-Isolated – some symptoms but non-conclusive (unconfirmed Covid-19)
- c) Self-Isolated – (person or someone else in their household is confirmed Covid-19)
- d) Shielded – other serious illness or health issues or someone else in their household (unrelated to Covid-19)

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<sup>1</sup> A full list of these is at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults> - it can be expected that people will be aware if they are within one of these groups.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>

The majority of travel requests are likely to be from passengers in category a) or d). However, given that passengers may have the virus without any apparent symptoms, it is prudent to take full precautions. (It may be assumed that anyone who is in category d) who develops symptoms or is confirmed to have COVID-19 will require immediate medical attention.)

Any person identified or known to be in categories b) and c) who has requested transport to a medical appointment should be referred to the Ambulance Service in the first instance, as they will require specific protected ambulance facilities. There could be situations where a self-isolated category c) passenger needs to be transported for dialysis (for example) and the CT service might normally have carried them. Any such cases should be assessed and discussed with healthcare agencies. Anyone with confirmed Covid-19 (or where there is someone in the household with confirmed Covid-19) who needs to be transported should be referred to the Ambulance Service.

Persons in category b) and especially c) who have requested transport for any other (i.e. non-medical) purpose would be compromising the isolation protocols and should be refused – schemes should explore other ways to accommodate what the passenger needs.

Undertaking journeys for shielded persons in category d) would be highly precarious and we would advise refusing any such requests and accommodating the person's needs through the home support service or Hub (see below). You should ensure, however, that the person is registered for this service and offer to assist them if they are unsure. Alternatively, you could offer to deliver provisions or pharmacy items to their door if you are able to offer such a service.

If any passenger requires a carer or assistant who does not live in the same household, then such persons should travel separately and meet the passenger at the destination. They should maintain the social distance at all times and not board the vehicle. If a passenger does travel with someone from within their own household, ensure that social distancing is maintained on board the vehicle (i.e. sitting 2 metres apart).

Irrespective of its passenger capacity, do not schedule more than one passenger to a vehicle at once (single occupancy) and ensure that there is time to clean the vehicle before the next pick-up is scheduled.

Multi-occupancy journeys would be acceptable only for category a) persons who are under 70 years of age or not pregnant, again ensuring that social distancing is maintained (i.e. sitting 2 metres apart). If practical, we suggest you remove some seats to create more distance.

## **Service Continuity**

Consider how you will maintain your service and especially the ability to receive calls and enquiries. You may need to take steps to ensure that you will be able to operate your service whilst working from home, e.g. by having the facility to divert calls to the core phone number onwards to a sequential list of alternative numbers. Agree the periods when you can take bookings and ensure that you have the resources to stick to these. Ensure that you can cover both telephone and email

bookings. Call backs, support calls and deliveries can of course take place outside these core booking times.

Be sure what driver and vehicle resources you can rely upon. Some of your volunteers may be self-isolating themselves, be in a high-risk category or be needing to concentrate on their own family's needs etc. Contact all your volunteers and discuss their situation to ensure you have a full understanding of available capacity.

As a general rule, younger people are less at risk from Covid-19 so what journeys are still undertaken should be allocated to the youngest drivers. It may be that paid staff can undertake these if volumes are small. However, willing they may be, do not place any older drivers at risk.

Everyone involved in a community transport operation is at risk – ensure that you start by making a point of regularly (at least daily) checking whether your staff and volunteers are well and symptom free, AND that nobody in their household is showing any relevant symptoms.

## **Maintaining Social Contact**

For many passengers, the transport scheme is an important means of social interaction, and the time spent with the driver or chatting to the booking staff can be important. We suggest that for those passengers who have cancelled journeys you make a point of calling them periodically for a chat – the risk of loneliness is clearly much greater for many of your customers and you may be able to assist them in a number of ways, for instance by referring them to other support agencies.

This could be delegated to those whom they know best (e.g. a regular driver or booking personnel with whom they have a rapport) which will also provide your volunteers with a worthwhile task even though they may not be able to drive. If you can't provide the trips, you will in this way at least be delivering on your charitable objectives to reduce social exclusion! We suggest that you let your funders know about this.

## **Community hubs and other support systems**

Each local authority is setting up a multi-agency Community Hub primarily to support the 1.5m persons who have been identified at high risk and who are being expected to socially isolate for 12 weeks. Make sure your local Hub knows who you are and what you can offer. It may well be that some of your passengers are receiving separate help from the Hub which may overlap with what you are offering. The Hub may be able to offer volunteers for your scheme, or otherwise involve you in its activities. Likewise you need to link to any other support structures that are being put in place.

## **Pharmacy & Other Deliveries**

(The use of community transport and car scheme operators to perform home deliveries has been covered in a separate guidance note <https://ctauk.org/covid19-guidance/>. We repeat the advice on pharmacy deliveries here because they might be considered an essential journey in their own right.)

One of the reasons that your customers might be making a journey with you is to order or to collect medicines. We suggest that this is now done without involving a passenger journey, and that you offer to deliver to the passenger. The main issue here will be observing the protocols for collecting prescriptions on behalf of someone else:

1. If the prescription is sent from the GP to an identified pharmacy directly (which many now are), you can collect the medicine on behalf of your service user if that person has told the pharmacy that they are happy for you to do so.
2. If the GP surgery issues a paper prescription, this can be taken to any pharmacy or dispenser. You can collect a paper prescription from a GP surgery for a third party if that person has told the surgery they're happy for you to collect it. You will usually be asked to confirm the name and address of the person you're collecting the prescription for.

The GP surgery is not legally required to check your identity, but some surgeries may ask for proof of identity to prevent the wrong prescription being given out. You can take a prescription to the pharmacy to collect someone else's medicine for them. The patient must complete part 1 of the prescription form (FP10) and the person collecting the medicine must complete parts 2 and 3, which includes identifying whether the recipient is exempt from prescription charges. So, this will mean taking the prescription to the individual for them to complete before going to the pharmacy.

In both cases above a named person is required (ID could be checked) so it is essential that the driver is not changed at short notice. You can find more information about picking up prescriptions at [nhs.uk/common-health-questions/caring-carers-and-long-term-conditions/can-i-pick-up-a-prescription-for-someone-else/](https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/caring-carers-and-long-term-conditions/can-i-pick-up-a-prescription-for-someone-else/)

Many pharmacies already offer prescription delivery services (in some cases without a charge), so it would be worth checking how they are coping with demand during the emergency and potentially offering to voluntarily augment these existing prescription delivery systems.

## **Volunteers**

As noted above, some volunteers themselves may be in high risk categories due to age or ill-health. These should not be placed at risk via any contact with passengers. They can still perform a useful service by simply ringing up passengers to make social contact and see if anything else can be done to assist. This should be co-ordinated by the transport organiser rather than done on an ad hoc basis, though the volunteers should do this from home.

Many people have come forward to numerous agencies wishing to volunteer in recent weeks and this may present a great opportunity to recruit new volunteers. Contact your local voluntary service agency or volunteer centre and ensure that your volunteering opportunities are understood and that there is an effective means by which volunteers can be routed to you. It is worth speaking to local authorities who are also currently co-ordinating teams of volunteers. You should also be aware of

the new national recruitment drive for volunteers <https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHS> and may wish to contact your local RVS to discuss how you can be involved or collaborate.

You must establish whether any of your existing volunteer drivers fall into 'at risk' groups, in which case you should exclude them from this service. This may mean that you need to appeal for more volunteers. Whilst you can fast-track any training, volunteers will still need to be DBS checked. During the current emergency, you can speed this up by checking ID documents by video link – see [gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-changes-to-standard-and-enhanced-id-checking-guidelines](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-changes-to-standard-and-enhanced-id-checking-guidelines).

We recommend that, given the nature of the service users, safeguarding training is included in your training package. As well as delivery drivers, having volunteers to handle customer communications via telephone or email will also be important. The more volunteers that you have available, the more the contact with service users can extend into a social chat going beyond the immediate need for groceries. This is a worthwhile activity in itself to support service users' ability to maintain social distancing or self-isolation without actually feeling isolated.

## **Collecting Passengers**

If you agree to undertake a journey, ensure that drivers and passengers understand the following rules. When drivers arrive to collect the passenger, they should:

- Knock on the door or ring the bell wearing gloves or otherwise shield the naked hand, for example with a disposable tissue, and then take some steps back before the door is answered, allowing at least a two metre bubble.
- If the passenger lives in a collective housing unit (care home or sheltered housing) observe any rules on entry restrictions that might be in place. If you need to use a key safe to enter, consider who used it last and whether you need to put on gloves / use a tissue.
- Ask the passenger how they are feeling, do they have any of the symptoms associated with Covid-19 (a high temperature and/or a new, continuous cough). Are they self-isolating, suspected or confirmed to have Covid-19? Ask the same question in respect of anybody else present at the property.
- If you have to enter the property, do not touch anything initially, call out and announce yourself and try to keep a 2 metre distance initially between you and the passenger until you have confirmation of their health.
- If the passenger is fit and well, continue as normal.
- If they are presenting as symptomatic then politely withdraw and inform the passenger / family that you have some precautionary calls to make first. Contact the office and inform them.
- If the passenger needs support or manual assistance to get into the vehicle, wear protective gloves.

- If you need to carry anything belonging to the passenger (such as shopping, frame etc) wear protective gloves.

The point to remember here is that infection may travel in either direction and therefore sticking to the protocols above acts as protection for the passenger as well as for the driver. But given that the passenger will be in an at-risk group, it is incumbent on you as an operator to ensure that you have minimised the risk to them. This is why you need to check that your drivers are themselves free from symptoms and that they come from a household where nobody has symptoms.

## **Cleanliness and Hygiene**

The Government has recommended some general principles to be followed to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- washing your hands more often - with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use a hand sanitiser.
- washing your hands when you get home or into work, when you blow your nose, sneeze or cough, eat or handle food.
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- avoid close contact with people who have symptoms.
- cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin and wash your hands.
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home or office.

Keeping vehicles as clean as possible is critical. It should be recognised that what might be practical with a fleet vehicle is less easy to impose on a volunteer's own car. The current regime of 'deep cleaning' that the ambulance service has adopted following the carriage of patients with the virus would be challenging to adopt elsewhere. Ambulances are designed to be decontaminated regularly and quickly to a sterile standard and largely do not feature surfaces that absorb moisture (such as carpets etc).

If passengers not known to have Covid-19 or similar symptoms are carried, a deep clean is not necessary. If it turns out that a passenger has been carried who is subsequently confirmed as infected by Covid-19, you should seek specialist advice – the vehicle will need a deep clean involving disinfectant spray and will need to be left unused for at least 72 hours.

However, for all vehicles (fleet or driver's own) in all other circumstances, a cleaning regime is still important. You should preferably use a disinfectant (which kills the virus) rather than simply detergent (which loosens it prior to it being washed off). We suggest testing the disinfectant in advance to avoid damaging the vehicle. Bleach and peroxide-based cleaners are likely to damage vinyl or plastic – use a product that is recommended for vehicle cleaning (of which there are several) and read the manufacturer's instructions.



Focus especially on areas of the vehicle which receive the most regular contact, including:

- Door handles (inside and out)
- Handrails
- Head rests
- Seat grab handles
- Seat backs
- Seat belts (tongue/buckle/webbing.)

When cleaning your vehicle, there are a few things to bear in mind:

- Using too much liquid can make interior fabrics damp, which will increase the likelihood that germs will collect and thrive. This can be overcome by being careful with the amount of water/disinfectant being used and maintaining adequate ventilation both during cleaning and vehicle operation. Adhesives can also fail with excessive cleaning.
- Make sure wet floors and surfaces are dried before passengers board.

Every vehicle should be equipped with hand sanitiser, disposable gloves, disposable tissues and a bag or container into which used / potentially contaminated material can be dropped into for secure disposal later. Volunteer training should include hand-washing, use of hand-gel, disposal of contaminated material and how to take off disposable gloves without touching the outer surface. (Lots of training material and downloadable posters are available from NHS websites).

Finally, you will need to consider the arrangements you can make for services users to pay for the service if you intend to continue charging (some are operating without charges for the duration). Given the variety of ways that CTs charge, there won't be a single system, but obviously you will want to minimise or eliminate cash handling, potentially through web-based card payments or by invoicing after the event. Now may be the moment to implement the capacity to accept telephone or web-based card payments if you don't have this already. Your financial administration will need to be developed to cope with this new challenge.

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We understand this is a time of real uncertainty for our members and, as your membership organisation, we'll be doing everything we can to make sure you have the guidance you need to make informed decisions on your activities going forward. As a reminder, you can access the latest guidance at [ctauk.org/covid19-guidance/](https://ctauk.org/covid19-guidance/) as well as contact our advice team. To ensure that you speak to the right person the first time, we would ask that you contact us via email on [advice@ctauk.org](mailto:advice@ctauk.org) to receive a call back.