Coronavirus Guidance for CT Car Schemes

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Key Information

Many Car Schemes have offered services during the pandemic, connecting passengers with shops, loved ones and key appointments. Operators have been implementing enhanced cleanliness processes and using risk assessments to make journeys as well as possible. Some cases of coronavirus, in particular in Scotland, have been associated with car sharing (though not with car schemes). When offering a service, operators should consider whether alternative options are available and if not take all possible safety precautions.

One of the biggest challenges in restarting community transport post lockdown will be restarting car schemes or using section 19 permits in small vehicles. The nature of car schemes means that maintaining two metres or 1m plus of social distancing is incredibly difficult, even in an MPV, so it is even more important to ensure PPE, ventilation and cleaning protocols are robust. Each operator will need to balance the needs of their passengers against the compromises that might be necessary when providing journeys. Eliminating all risk when operating a car will not be possible, therefore it is important that all reasonable steps are taken to minimise risk for employees, volunteers and service users.

Car Schemes rely heavily on volunteer drivers, who may feel less inclined to undergo training and it may be more difficult to hold them to account for vehicle sanitation. Consider ways of making training accessible and engaging, as well as stressing the importance of the changes you’re implementing.

If your Car Scheme is principally engaged in healthcare, you should work with your local GPs and hospitals to ensure you are meeting the standards they require, enabling you to offer the most appropriate service for your community.

Carrying passengers during the COVID-19 crisis is essentially a health and safety concern and, as a CT operator, you should work within your existing health and safety framework. Your designated health and safety representative should ensure that they are familiar with the range of government and official guidance that has been issued, and keep abreast of the frequent updates – these sources are listed below. You should ensure that at least one person is delegated this role, and that they have sufficient authority to enforce measures if needs be.

Whilst minibuses may still be taking passengers to a range of activities, the “one to one” nature of car schemes means you will most likely only be engaged in one sort of journey at any time. For example, Passenger A may require transport to healthcare, which necessitates certain precautions but Passenger B the next day might only be going to the shops, with different precautions entailed. This difference has also been key in our thinking when shaping this guidance, drawing on best practice from Taxi, Non-Emergency Passenger Transport and Car Sharing information.
The current recommendation across the UK government and taxi guidance is that a passenger sits in
the rear leftside seat, diagonal from the driver, though some emerging advice recommends that the
passenger ought to sit next to the driver, always facing forward. We will endeavour to update our
documents on car schemes should this guidance change, and we also implore you to review what
your local authority requires.

General information and guidance for Car Schemes

The COVID-19 crisis is a constantly changing situation, which means that you will need to review your
organisation’s circumstances weekly, if not daily, based on the new information emerging and your
own operational experience. You should also consider the local perspective, which may differ from
the national one. Here’s some actions you should put into place that’ll help you meet those
challenges:

- Undertake new risk assessments – these should detail all the steps that you’ve taken to
  reduce/eliminate the likelihood of virus transmission. Use our member resources on this here.
- Update risk documents like registers and assessments.
- Ensure that your reporting and escalation systems are responsive and robust.
- Keep in active, regular and open communication with:
  - your trustee board – they should always be aware of new developments taking place in
    order to make informed decisions.
  - stakeholders and funders – they should be aware of your organisation’s service levels and
    changes put in place, and make sure those will not conflict with any contract terms.
  - staff, volunteers and beneficiaries – they should always be aware of the steps
    implemented to safeguard them.
- Check all insurance coverage is relevant to your altered operation and support volunteer drivers
to do the same. We recently hosted an Advice Drop-in session with Ben Harris, from Endsleigh,
our CTA Insurance partner, where keeping in touch with your insurers came out as a key theme.
Read the recap blog post here.
- Before putting any changes to services into action, make sure you understand the levels of
  financial risk you will incur by doing so, and always seek out the various support funds that have
  been made available. A curated list of these from CTA is available here.
- If offering new types of services, always check your VAT situation.
- Wherever possible, maintain any activities that contribute to the safety of your operation (e.g.
  MiDAS, PATS, CPC, vehicle and equipment inspection and maintenance).
Risk assessments

Although risk assessments should always target the specific circumstances of each operation, there are a number of issues that will commonly affect most operators:

- Older people and those with underlying health issues – given that most car scheme beneficiaries and some staff/volunteers fall into these categories, special attention should be paid to them
- Passengers – ensuring customers’ basic needs are met and that they’re not at risk of loneliness if unable to travel
- Vehicles – accommodating passengers while reducing contact, minimizing cash handling and time in the passenger’s home, cleaning and PPE
- Drivers – regular monitoring of health and wellbeing, social distance in the office/depot, provision of PPE

CTA has created a COVID-specific Risk Assessment template and a How to Guide for Risk Assessments which can be accessed on our COVID-19 guidance page here. We have made these usually member-only resources open access to help get services back up and running.

Training

All frontline staff/volunteers should be given COVID-19 training on newly implemented operational procedures and safety measures. It is also important that you talk through the risk scenarios identified to your staff/volunteers and provide them with training on how to deal with potential occurrences (e.g. contact with persons showing symptoms, lost property, queues at shops).

Regular weekly briefings are recommended, especially with frontline staff. Make sure you keep records of all communications, as well as training provided.

If more specialised knowledge is required, always seek guidance and training input from the relevant experts.
Specific Journey Types

Non-Emergency Passenger Transport (NEPT)

There is inherent risk in transporting passengers to a medical appointment, however, there is also risk in that passenger not receiving the medical help required. As this type of journey potentially carries more risk of Covid19 transmission, you may want to complete a risk assessment specific to NEPT and offer drivers and passengers a higher level of PPE cover in the vehicle.

- Make clear to passengers and drivers that there is greater risk involved in NEPT
- Use “Level 1 PPE” to reduce risk of infection. If offering the service on behalf of your local NHS Trust or Health Board, it may be worth asking them to furnish you with the necessary equipment.

**Level 1 PPE is comprised of:**

- Single pair of gloves
- Disposable plastic apron
- Fluid repellent surgical mask
- Eye protection, if you feel there is a risk of patient coughing or splash/droplet exposure

Offering lifts to services like food shopping or prescription pick up

- Before offering the journey, consider if you could bring the item(s) to the service user instead
- If you are concerned with passengers’ emotional wellbeing, a telephone befriending service or an outdoors socially distanced visit could be a good alternative to a shopping trip
- For non-medical journeys, face coverings for both parties may be sufficient, but we would highly recommend a full risk assessment before making a decision. When you are conducting your risk assessment, review what PPE is necessary for non-medical journeys. A face covering for both driver and passenger may be sufficient, this will depend on your operation.
- Seriously consider journey time, particularly in rural areas where amenities may be far away or in congested city centres. Time spent in the vehicle is a key factor as longer time spans increase the risk of droplets spread. Is there a closer option or a delivery service?

Offering lifts to services like hairdressers

With some UK regions and governments asking citizens to avoid car sharing at all, we would highly recommend limiting journeys to those that cannot be avoided and where the service cannot be delivered to the passenger without them travelling.
Recommendations for all Journey Types

Staff and volunteers

Practical measures should be put into place in order to protect staff and volunteers, and you should be proactive in ensuring that those measures are complied with. Here’s our recommendations:

- Provide single-use seat covers to reduce the need to deep clean car interior
- Ensure volunteers have a regular supply of the PPE they need for the kinds of journeys they are providing
- Support volunteer drivers to confirm whether the pandemic has affected their insurance policy.
- Monitor the health of frontline staff/volunteers closely, and (as and when possible) ensure they undergo tests
- Ensure that safety measures are put in place in order to better manage situations where staff/volunteers come into contact with each other (e.g. car sharing, shared office/depot spaces such as kitchens, toilets and break rooms)
- Keep an open line of communication with each member of your team. This will help you assess how comfortable they are in continuing to provide the services, what support they may need from you and if any existing underlying health issues may be a concern (this could extend to their immediate household).

Drivers over 70

Many Car Schemes rely on the generous donation of time and miles from drivers over 70. In the current pandemic however, it may not be safe for older volunteers to do so.

- Evaluate if there’s a need to deploy drivers deemed to be at greater risk due to age - bear in mind that some insurance companies have now withheld cover from drivers over 70 for car schemes.
- Considering the extra risk involved in NEPT journeys, you might opt to reserve those for drivers at lower risk
- Discuss with drivers what else they might do to support passengers. For example, they could make weekly phone calls to those passengers who are not yet able to use the car scheme for whatever reason and would appreciate a chat.
- If you do decide that isn’t safe for them to continue driving with you, be sure to show your appreciation for their dedication to your service
- We will be creating resources for having difficult conversations like these with volunteers, so keep an eye on our website.
Vehicles

Vehicles are a fundamental component of the whole CT operation, and you should be very thorough at assessing potential risks. When implementing safety measures, consider the following:

- Car schemes have very limited ability to meet social distancing requirements; however, cars should be subject to sanitised cleaning and, where possible, passengers should be seated in the rear seat. Training should be provided to volunteer drivers using their own vehicles on how to safely and effectively clean their vehicle.

- In-vehicle shields - there are now a variety of in-car dividers, but before investing, you must check the insurance and MOT implications with the insurer and MOT testing centre. For reference, the Taxi and PHC guidance on shields is included at the end of this document.

- Cleanliness – sanitized wiping of all contact surfaces (seats, handles, grabs, seatbelts, wheelchair handles) between each passenger, and deep cleaning after a day’s driving.

- Hand sanitiser should be supplied to all volunteers and they must use it each time they leave and re-enter the vehicle, and must ensure that passengers use hand sanitiser before entering the car.

- Ventilation – it is essential that the car is always properly ventilated. The internal air system must be set to circulate and windows should at least be partially open at all times. It is recommended that you inform passengers they may need to be appropriately dressed.

- Minimising/eliminating cash handling – this may mean using a credit/account system or adding facilities for receiving contactless card payments.

- Always consider if any changes you have made will impact on accessibility levels, particularly if transporting a passenger who uses a wheelchair without a Passenger Assistant.

Passengers

It is imperative that operations are planned and delivered with the safety of passengers in mind. Here’s our advice on keeping passengers safe when resuming services:

- Regularly communicate with passengers, informing them of your organisation’s newly implemented measures – this includes what is required of them and that the service will be declined if the passenger (or anyone else in their household) is showing symptoms.

- Make clear which kinds of journey are deemed ‘essential’ and only agree to provide these. It is also crucial to make these decisions with reference to the journey length.

- It may be worth keeping a directory of alternatives for those journeys you’re unable to provide. Examples include shops that offer delivery, befriending services and pharmacies that make drop offs.
• Where passengers require assistance, ensure that you understand what this will involve and that drivers agree to provide it. This is particularly relevant to car schemes, as having another member of the household come along to support will increase risk to the driver, and is thus not ideal.

• For passengers who need a higher degree of physical assistance, the use of a wheelchair to get them from home to the car may be safer, rather than steadying and guiding assistance, as the person is facing away from the driver/assistant and physical contact is limited. This will need to be approached sensitively with the passenger.

• Remind passengers that ventilation is key, even in bad weather, so warm clothes are recommended.

• **Passenger Bubbles.** To further minimise the risk of sitting closer than two metres, you should seriously consider a bubble between a single driver and passenger. This is particularly pertinent if you offer NEPT.

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**Appendix 1**

**The latest guidance from the UK and devolved government**

Guidance from the UK Government, Scottish Government, Northern Ireland Executive and Welsh Government is no longer consistent. With lockdowns and different tiers of restrictions in place across the UK, each operator should ascertain if the journey is permissible in their local area.

In some cases, it may be that the place where a passenger is picked up is under different restrictions from the place at which the passenger will be set-down. An operator should make sure that the whole of the journey is permissible.

You can find the latest information for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on our main guidance page at [ctauk.org/covid19-guidance/](http://ctauk.org/covid19-guidance/).

**Appendix 2**

**Taxi and PHC Guidance on Shields**

*This guidance is taken from Scottish Government Guidance for Taxis and PHCs. It is not an exhaustive lift, nor is it specific to CT. It is useful however as a list of considerations when fitting screens.*

If an operator decides to fit a protective screen to the licensed car, the operator must contact their local licensing authority to advise that he/she has plans to do this. There must be proof that the relevant insurer has been contacted and that the insurer has confirmed that the necessary insurance would be unaffected by the proposed installation of the screen. The licensing authority may consider this to be a material change to the vehicle of which they require to be notified formally in terms of...
Paragraph 9 of Schedule 1 to the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982. If formal notification is required, a fee may have to be paid to the licensing authority to process the notification, which would also involve consultation with Police Scotland regarding the proposed change(s) to the vehicle. In any event, if a screen is fitted, the operator must ensure that it is fitted safely and securely. In addition, it:

- Must comply with the Road Vehicle (Construction and Use) Regulations.
- Must not be permanently installed in the vehicle
- Must be fitted in such a way to not affect the structural integrity of the vehicle, or interfere with any manufacturer fitted safety equipment e.g. airbags
- Must not wrap around the driver seat and create a partition between the two front seats, in addition to the rear cabin area.
- The partition used MUST be clear and transparent and can ONLY be fitted across the rear of both front seats, creating a partition between the front and rear cabin area of the vehicle
- Any screen must be tested to the relevant EU standard for an original equipment type approval test covering interior fittings
- The screen must be approved by MIRA or other comparable independent product engineering, testing, consultancy and certification organisation.
- Screens should be constructed of PETg or polycarbonate
- The screen should not impede the driver’s vision, movement, or communication with passengers
- The screen should not impede driver or passenger access or egress to the vehicle