

Chauffeur services in the UK during the Coronavirus pandemic - suggestion for best practice.

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The following suggestion for best practice has been put together using information acquired from the following sources:

- 1) Her Majesty's Government guidance document: ***'Working safely during COVID-19 in offices and contact centres'*** (published 11th May 2020) by the Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and in conjunction with Public Health England (PHE).
- 2) Her Majesty's Government guidance document: ***'Working safely during COVID-19 in or from a vehicle'*** (published 11th May 2020) by the Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and in conjunction with Public Health England (PHE).
- 3) Her Majesty's Government guidance document: ***'Safer transport - guidance for operators'*** (published 12th May 2020)
- 4) Department for Transport (DfT) Guidance document: ***'Safer transport guidance for operators'*** (published 12th May 2020).
- 5) Transport for London (TfL) ***'Notice 09/20, 08/20, and 07/20: Updated advise for taxi and private hire licencees'*** (09/20 & 8/20 published 12th June 2020) after consultation with the London Scientific and Technological Cell (STAC).
- 6) Public Health England (PHE) guidance document: ***'How to use and wear a cloth face covering'*** (published 11th May 2020)
- 7) Various Open Resource material, including the Which? Magazine report ***'Coronavirus: where to buy face masks'*** by Anna Studman (published 14th May 2020)

Overview

In mid-May 2020 the UK Government announced a return to work for those employees who cannot work from home. The UK professional chauffeur industry faces a specific set of challenges with regards to reassuring customers and clients, and providing a safe and effective transportation service which minimises (as far as possible) the risk of the spread of Coronavirus COVID-19. This document is a suggestion of best practice based on various factors and guidelines suggested by Her Majesty's Government departments and subject matter experts. It attempts to offer a clear approach to reducing the associated risks, and aims to provide a focal point for the information relevant to our industry.

The GoPC suggests that, if the current Government and associated authority guidelines are understood and closely followed, that travel via a professionally driven chauffeur service offers a lower-risk option than any other form of travel.

The Government guidance documents and advice will continue to develop as lockdown restrictions change - this document is based on the available information correct as of 19th June 2020.

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Quote from Public Health England (PHE):

“PHE recommends trying to keep 2 metres apart from people where possible, as a precaution. However, this is not a rule and the science is complex.

The key thing is not to be too close to people for more than a short amount of time, as much as you can”.

Clearly a chauffeur-driven passenger cannot follow this suggestion, and neither can the chauffeur. This document aims to provide the safest possible options and alternatives for both.

PPE

Face coverings/masks

As of 15th June 2020, Transport for London (TfL) have advised all London Private Hire Chauffeur and taxi drivers to wear a face covering, and has asked all passengers to do the same. This instruction may spread to other licensing authorities throughout the UK.

It is important to understand the difference between the benefits that a face mask or face covering can actually offer, as opposed to what the public or common perception may be. The best standards of face mask are those used by the medical profession - and this is mainly due to the close-fitting nature (no gaps at any point where the mask meets the face). Also, the type of filtration used. Any other type of mask or covering will most likely have gaps, and this fact alone means the following: **that the mask or face covering may stop the spread of infection from the wearer to others. It will not, however, protect the wearer from infection from others.** Also depending on the type of material and filtration system, tight-fitting masks may also not offer full protection. Various government departments are requesting that the public do not purchase medical profession standard equipment, but instead leave these stocks to be available to the NHS. Therefore, after taking multiple factors into account, it is suggested that chauffeurs and operators source and utilise washable/reusable fabric face coverings which are handled and sanitised in the correct way*.

It is important that chauffeurs and operators (and passengers) are fully aware of the **actual benefits** and are not provided with a false sense of security, or that the PPE inadvertently offers a placebo effect of complete safety. Chauffeurs wearing masks or face coverings should be aware that the masks are to protect the passengers rather than themselves. Passengers of course should also be made to wear disposable face masks or coverings, and supplies should be available in the vehicle and provided to those passengers who do not have their own. This is to protect the chauffeur and to maintain a clean sanitised vehicle interior.

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*A cloth covering or mask should cover the wearer's mouth and nose and allow the wearer to breathe comfortably. HANDS MUST BE WASHED (minimum 20 seconds) before putting it on and washed again after taking it off. After use, the re-usable mask must be carefully placed in a disposable bag until it is washed. The wearer must AVOID TOUCHING THEIR EYES, NOSE OR MOUTH AT ALL TIMES. DO NOT TOUCH THE FRONT OF THE FACE COVERING OR THE PART OF THE COVERING THAT HAS BEEN IN CONTACT WITH THE MOUTH AND NOSE. The face covering or mask can be washed with other laundry in a washing machine - the bag must be disposed of and hands washed again. Each chauffeur who is part of a team should of course have their own mask, and not share. These same procedures apply to those working in an office environment. See relevant section below.

a) Disposable gloves

Disposable gloves, in reality, do not afford any added protection from the spread of COVID-19. In some cases their use may even inadvertently increase the spread of the virus, due to the false sense of security they may offer the wearer. If the COVID-19 bacteria is picked up on a glove after contact, it can then be passed to every other object or surface the wearer touches, such as a car steering wheel for example. Or more concerningly the eyes, nose, or mouth. Infection is not possible through the skin, therefore simply washing hands (minimum 20 seconds) thoroughly and often will actually afford the exact same protection as wearing disposable gloves.

However, there is a certain aesthetic assurance that may be appreciated by passengers and clients, therefore it is suggested that disposable gloves could be worn by the chauffeurs AND passengers with the proviso that all are fully aware of the facts, and that the gloves (both passenger's and driver's) must be carefully disposed of as soon as possible after completion of the task. **The wearer must not touch their eyes, nose or mouth, and must ensure that hands are washed correctly both before putting the gloves and immediately after taking them off.** Hand sanitiser must be available in vehicles, and passengers should make use of this before entering the vehicle and being offered a fresh pair of gloves by the chauffeur. All surfaces touched with (or without) the gloves must be sanitised after.

- **Handshakes as a greeting/courtesy for passengers should be avoided.**
- **Carrying passenger's luggage as a courtesy should also, where possible, be avoided.**

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b) Contactless thermometers

It is suggested (by the GoPC and its NHS Health Care professional consultant, Simon Greenfield) that contactless thermometers could potentially be used by chauffeurs and operators. It is obviously important that every chauffeur is fit for duty, and could be checked on arrival for work to see if they have a high temperature*. If so, they should immediately return home and self-isolate as per the operators/PHE guidelines. If a chauffeur is commencing work when no colleagues are available to assist then he or she could self-check and act appropriately. ***Chauffeurs should not commence a task knowing that they have a high temperature* but should instead source an alternative chauffeur to complete the task on their behalf. This will be a difficult choice, but a necessary one.***

Passengers could also be checked for a high temperature* once they give their consent. If a temperature* is discovered, then the journey should be aborted if possible. Pickups at airport terminals or other remote locations may present a unique challenge, and discretion will need to be used. However, for pickups from the home or office environment the journey should be aborted if a high temperature is discovered.

*Public Health England (PHE) states that anything over 37.8 Celcius is classed as a potential COVID-19 infected person.

c) Partition screens

Perspex/plastic partition screens have recently become available. The recent report via TfL/STAC explains that unless the screens are hermetically (airtight) sealed at all points (with no portal or opening) then they do not provide full protection from coughs or sneezes/spread of the virus. With a fully & correctly sealed unit, communication between driver and passenger would not be possible unless an intercom system was fitted. With this in mind, the majority of screens currently available do not offer realistic effectiveness. Chauffeurs and operators who choose to have these screens fitted should by all means do so, however it is vitally important that they are honest, truthful, and accurate with the facts when dealing with their clients. Chauffeurs and operators should refrain from advising their clients that they are fully protected, as this is not fact. Chauffeurs and operators should not feel pressured to install partition screens, and this document provides the validation for that choice. Face covering PPE provides the same level of protection as a screen. Some chauffeur vehicles have side air bags that deploy from the side pillars, and if fitted without consideration these screens could (potentially) interfere with air bag deployment. There is no hard evidence to prove this point, however common sense would suggest that anything obstructing an airbag would detract from customer safety, and the GoPC strongly recommends that this is taken into consideration. It is fair to say that the general public may feel more comfortable seeing a partition (regardless of whether it provides a genuine benefit) and an element of reassurance may result. However, it is important that everyone is aware of the facts surrounding this (and all) PPE.

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Vehicle environment

- a) Anti-bac gel (60% alcohol level and above) or sanitiser wipes must be readily available to both passengers and chauffeurs. PPE (as discussed above) should be made available to the passenger(s) if they do not provide their own. **Chauffeurs and operators should clearly share and explain the Government & authority guidelines regarding the correct use and limitations of PPE to their clients.**
- b) All vehicles should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised before after each use. Commonly used touch-points such as door handles (both interior and exterior) control buttons (front and rear) headrests, armrests, steering wheel etc. should be sanitised using an appropriate disposable cloth and anti-bacterial detergent.
- c) The GoPC recommends that care should be taken that the leather interior of chauffeur cars does not become damaged by using harsh or overly-powerful cleaning agents.
- d) Large MPV's such as the Mercedes-Benz V-Class are the default vehicle for use, as they provide the 2-metre distancing required between the driver and rear passenger seat. Guidelines suggest that seating back-to-back is preferable, and some MPV's (including the V-Class) provide that option if preferred by driver/passenger.
- e) There will be times when MPV's are not available, and in the case that a saloon car is used (for example Mercedes-Benz S-Class or E-Class) guidelines state that the passenger should sit in the rear-left seat to maximise the distance between passenger and driver. Travelling in the front passenger seat should be avoided where possible.
- f) Windows should be open slightly when in use to allow ventilation and a constant flow of air through the vehicle. This reduces the risk of spreading the virus within the vehicle between occupants.
- g) Air conditioning recirculation options **SHOULD NOT** be used, and instead a flow of air from the outside into the vehicle.

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Office environment

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- a) **Cleaning/sanitisation:**
Following suggested guidelines, any chauffeur operator office or working environment should be cleaned and sanitised as much as possible, paying particular attention to common touch-points such as door handles and desks. **Hands should be washed for a minimum of 20 seconds, and often.** Staff welfare facilities (toilets, washrooms, showers etc.) should be regularly and thoroughly cleaned. Thorough cleaning should take place on entry and exit as a minimum, and also at times in between where possible. Appropriate equipment (cleaning products and anti-bac gel etc) should be made available at all times. Commonly shared items in the office, such as landline phones, kettle, computer keyboard/mouse, window sliders, fridge door, door handles etc. would need to be carefully sanitised after use by each team member. Bins should be emptied regularly.
- b) 2 metre distancing should be observed, and tape should be laid on the floor area where possible to mark and define areas to maintain this.
- c) **Ventilation:** in line with suggested practice, windows should always be open when occupied to allow adequate airflow and ventilation, thereby reducing the risks of virus spreading.
- d) **Shift patterns**
Guidelines suggest that members of an office-based team use a staggered shift pattern to help minimise the numbers of people present at any one time. This level of staff presence is to be reviewed as lockdown policy changes.

Garage environments

- a) All commonly used contact points, such as garage door handles, shutter up/down buttons, vacuum cleaner, power wash, etc. should be sanitised after use by any team member.
- b) Bins in the garage environment should be emptied as frequently as possible.

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Conclusion

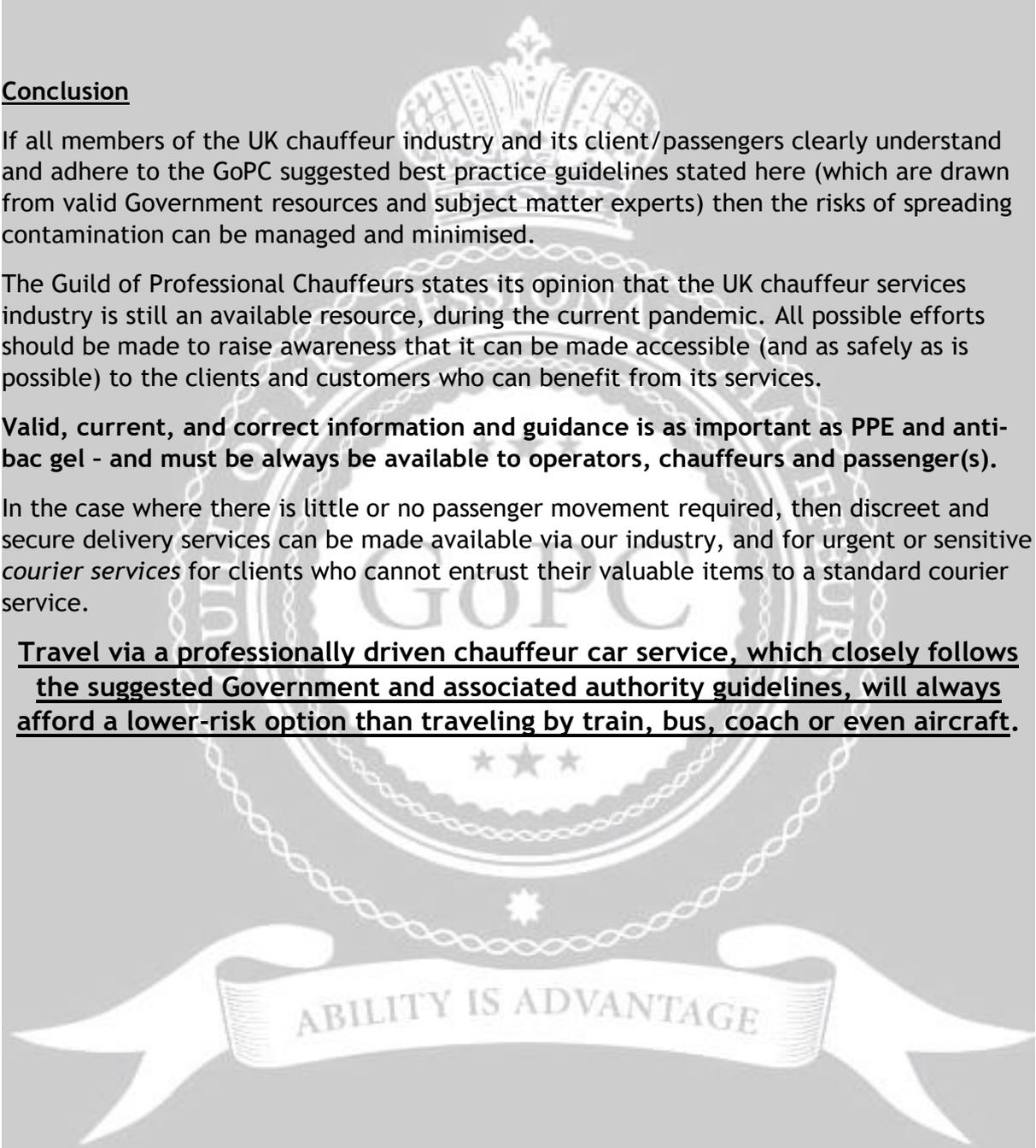
If all members of the UK chauffeur industry and its client/passengers clearly understand and adhere to the GoPC suggested best practice guidelines stated here (which are drawn from valid Government resources and subject matter experts) then the risks of spreading contamination can be managed and minimised.

The Guild of Professional Chauffeurs states its opinion that the UK chauffeur services industry is still an available resource, during the current pandemic. All possible efforts should be made to raise awareness that it can be made accessible (and as safely as is possible) to the clients and customers who can benefit from its services.

Valid, current, and correct information and guidance is as important as PPE and anti-bac gel - and must be always be available to operators, chauffeurs and passenger(s).

In the case where there is little or no passenger movement required, then discreet and secure delivery services can be made available via our industry, and for urgent or sensitive *courier services* for clients who cannot entrust their valuable items to a standard courier service.

Travel via a professionally driven chauffeur car service, which closely follows the suggested Government and associated authority guidelines, will always afford a lower-risk option than traveling by train, bus, coach or even aircraft.



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