

# Taxi and Private Licence Holders Covid-19 Guidance

Taxi and private hire operators provide an essential service to the public and under current government guidelines can continue to operate. If you're a taxi driver working during the COVID-19 crisis, you are no doubt be worried about your own health and safety as well as that of your passengers.

The situation is constantly changing and so passengers, drivers and operators are advised to keep up to date with the most recent travel guidance. Welsh Government have published [information on coronavirus](#) (COVID-19) and [travel and transport advice](#) and guidance for [passengers](#) and [operators](#).

Drivers and operators owe a duty to take reasonable care for the safety of their passengers and so are advised to translate the principles and examples in the government guidance into specific actions.

Following the most up-to-date hygiene and social distancing advice will help keep you and your customers safer.

- Do not work as a driver or travel as a passenger if you have COVID-19, are experiencing any of the [main symptoms](#) or if you believe you have been exposed to the virus through a passenger (or elsewhere).
- Keep the vehicle well-ventilated: open windows if comfortable and air conditioning should not be set to re-circulate.
- Follow [social distancing guidance](#) and avoid physical contact: use contactless payments where possible.
- Wash your hands regularly and do not touch your face. Drivers may wish to have hand sanitiser and tissues on hand for themselves and passengers.
- After each customer, the vehicle should be cleaned thoroughly using disinfectant spray, in particular the surfaces customers are likely to touch, such as door handles and seat belt clips.

- Drivers are advised to clean the areas of the vehicle they touch regularly a few times throughout the day and always at the start and end of each shift. This includes door handles, steering wheel, handbrake and switches.
- Guidance on wearing [facemasks](#) within a Private Hire/Hackney Carriage vehicle has been updated by the Welsh Government
- There has been an increase in interest of the use of screens as a way of providing physical separation between drivers and passengers in order to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. There is no evidence available that demonstrates that partitions in taxis or PHVs reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 infection, but may have consequences as to what might happen inside the vehicle in the event of a collision. It is important that the installation of any a protective screen is safe and doesn't introduce new and unintended safety hazards. The Council currently does not intend to make the installation of screens a requirement. Drivers wishing to install a screen would need to do so in accordance with the Council's policy for installing temporary safety screen in private hire vehicles including obtaining permission from the licencing department. The policy is to be found here.

A private hire operator is under no obligation to enter into a contract to provide a private hire vehicle for anybody, provided any such refusal is not based on a protected characteristic under *s. 4 of the Equality Act 2010* (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation). Further guidance on when it would be reasonable to refuse a fare can be found on the [institute of licensing's](#) website.

Further useful information can be found on the [Welsh Government](#) website.

# Temporary Screens in Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles Policy

## Summary

1. The Council's conditions of licence require any modifications to the vehicle to be approved by the licensing authority. If a driver/operator wants to fit a temporary screen they should follow the Approval Procedure below.
2. It is the responsibility of the driver/operator to ensure that the device installed is compliant with government and industry regulations, is fit for purpose and does not compromise public safety.
3. Screens need to be regularly cleaned and appropriately maintained
4. The Council reserves the right to require the removal of any screens if concerns as to their safety, fitness for purpose or compliance with health and safety legislation exist.

## Introduction

5. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, we have recently received enquiries from drivers regarding the installation of protective screens in their vehicles between the front and rear seats.
6. Partitions or safety screens provide a physical barrier between drivers and passengers in the vehicle. They are commonly installed as a safety feature to protect the driver from physical attacks or theft. There has been an increase in interest of the use of screens as a way of providing physical separation between drivers and passengers in order to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.
7. There is no evidence available that demonstrates that partitions in taxis or PHVs reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 infection. Partitions in taxis or PHVs do not provide a fully sealed compartment which completely separates the driver from

the passenger. Therefore, whilst it is possible that partitions may reduce the risk of transmission of infection, the risk would not be eliminated entirely.

8. The Licensing Team appreciates that anything which helps to protect drivers and passengers from the spread of coronavirus is to be welcomed, but it is important that the installation of any aftermarket equipment is safe and doesn't introduce new and unintended safety hazards.
9. Following comprehensive safety testing, vehicles will have achieved European Whole Vehicle Type Approval and changing or adding to the interior of the vehicle can potentially alter the 'type approval' of the vehicle. Additionally, badly fitted, inappropriately constructed units, or products made using unsafe materials, could have a catastrophic impact in the event of a vehicle being involved in a road traffic accident.
10. The Council is aware that there are companies advertising the installations '*that have been fully risk assessed*', which do not conform to legal requirements. Drivers should also be aware that screen installation may also affect the vehicle's ability to pass an MOT, such as where they restrict the movement of the front seats. Drivers are advised to obtain independent confirmation from the vehicle manufacturer, MIRA (or comparable body) and their insurer before incurring the expense of installing a screen which may not be compliant and may be unsafe.
11. The Council's conditions of licence state:

***Modifications to vehicle***

*No material alteration or change to the specification, design, construction or appearance of the vehicle shall be made without the approval of the Authority.*

12. For these reasons, prior to voluntarily installing any screening device in your vehicle you must apply for approval to install a temporary screen following the procedure below.

**General requirements**

13. The decision to install a safety screen is for the driver, proprietor and/or operator to make, after carrying out your own risk assessment. Due to the wide and diverse variety of vehicles and different types of safety partition screens available, it is not

possible to offer specific purchase or installation advice in respect of these devices, however the following minimum requirements need to be satisfied:

- a. The device must be purpose-built to use as a safety screen within a vehicle and must be suitable for the specific make and model of vehicle.
  - b. Not wrap around the driver seat and create a partition between the two front seats, in addition to the rear cabin area.
  - c. The installation and / or design of the device must not adversely influence or interfere with the structural integrity or driver and passenger safety systems (including airbags) in the vehicle. In particular the installation must:
    - i. Not put passengers and/or the driver at any additional risk during a collision and/or when in use generally as a taxi or private hire vehicle.
    - ii. Not interfere with the safe operation of the vehicle and/or the vehicles safety features at any time.
    - iii. Not obscure or interfere with the view of the driver and/or passengers in any way.
  - d. Screens must be professionally and securely fitted and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications and recommendations
  - e. Devices should remain free of scratches, clouding or stickers which would impede the drivers or passengers' visibility.
  - f. Screens should not impede the driver's movement or communication with passengers.
  - g. Screens should not impede driver or passenger entry or egress to the vehicle or present a trip hazard.
14. If you have installed an approved safety screen in your vehicle you must ensure that you clean the screen after each passenger journey, along with other hard surfaces such as door handles, window winders, seat belts, car payment devices, the rear or the front seats and other surfaces passengers may have touched using normal household disinfectant. Drivers should then wash/sanitise their own hands. A thorough clean of the vehicle with normal cleaning products should be completed at the end of each shift/working day.

15. The proprietor shall ensure that the safety screen is properly and regularly maintained and serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions by a suitably qualified person. Written records of all maintenance and servicing shall be made and retained by the proprietor for a minimum of 12 months. Such written records shall be made available on demand by an authorised officer of the Council, or a Police officer.

### **Approval Procedure**

16. If you wish to fit a protective screen you will need to apply to the Council at [environment.licensing@newport.gov.uk](mailto:environment.licensing@newport.gov.uk) providing confirmation that:

- a. The installation will be conducted in accordance with the requirements of this policy.
- b. Your insurance will still be valid if you fit the protective screen.
- c. The product to be installed is compliant with government and industry regulations, will not compromise the safety of the vehicle and is approved by a MIRA (or comparable body) for use in the UK.
- d. You agree to remove the protective screen in less than 21 days after the date the Welsh Government officially declares an end to the current social distancing restrictions relating to Covid-19.

17. Upon the Authority being satisfied that the proposed installation meets the criteria outlined above you will be permitted to install a safety screen in your vehicle.

18. Once the partition or screen is installed the vehicle owner must email the Licensing Section with the following:

- a. Certification from the installer or other evidence to prove that the installation is:
  - i. Compliant with government and industry regulations, for example the Road Vehicle (Construction and Use) Regulations and relevant safety, UK and European Community (EC) legislation;

- ii. Certified by the vehicle manufacturer as not compromising the safety of the vehicle;
- iii. compliant with the relevant UN ECE/EU standard for an original equipment type approval test covering interior fittings. The screen and installation should be approved by MIRA, Millbrook or other comparable independent product engineering, testing, consultancy and certification organisation.

b. Photograph(s) of the partition or screen installed in the vehicle.

c. A copy of the vehicle owner/operators email to the insurance company and the insurance company's acknowledgment that the insurance cover remains valid.

19. The Council reserves the right to require the screen to be removed if not satisfied that it is safe, fit for purpose and legally compliant.