

# Transportation Program Handbook

*Prepared, designed  
And presented by*

**Niagara County  
Health Department  
and  
VMC Group, Inc.**

*Compiled by*  
**VMC Group, Inc.**  
*for the*  
**Niagara County  
Health Department**



**PLEASE CALL VMC**  
**FOR ALL**  
**TRANSPORTATION QUESTIONS**  
**(716) 285-6000**

**Program  
Telephone Numbers and Addresses**

***PLEASE CALL VMC FOR ALL TRANSPORTATION  
QUESTIONS at (716) 285-6000***

**Niagara County Health Department  
Children with Special Needs**

Trott Access Center  
1001 – 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Niagara Falls NY 14301

**Early Intervention Program**

Phone: (716) 278-1691  
Fax: (716) 278-8288

**Preschool Special Education**

Phone: (716) 439-7460  
Fax: (716) 439-7457

**Hours**

Monday through Friday  
8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**VMC Group, Inc.**

9701 Niagara Falls Blvd., Suite 1-A  
Niagara Falls NY 14304  
Phone: (716) 285-6000  
Fax: (716) 285-1000

**Hours**

Monday through Friday  
7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

**Transporter**

Bus Company\_\_\_\_\_

Driver\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number\_\_\_\_\_

Notes

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As you can see, the policies and procedures are really quite simple and easy to understand. They are designed so that you, the parents and guardians of children in this program, will have the peace of mind that comes with knowing that your children are safe and well cared for. However, as we mentioned earlier, none of these policies will be truly effective without your cooperation. With your help we can ensure that your children will enjoy the services provided for them, and will return to you safely and on time.

*Thank you for helping us help you!*

## **Accidents**

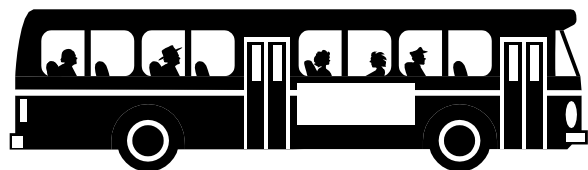
In the event of any accident, regardless of its severity, VMC and the County will be notified by the transporter immediately. You and your child's program will also be notified immediately by the transporter. If you are notified of such an accident, information and answers to your questions regarding the occurrence can be obtained by calling VMC Group, Inc.

## **Vehicle Breakdowns**

In the event that the vehicle carrying your child breaks down on the way home from their program, another vehicle will be sent to complete the trip. VMC will be notified of this and the transporter will telephone you so that you know your child will be a little late in arriving home.

## **Illness of Child During Program Day**

If your child becomes ill during the school day (after transport to the program site or before the regularly scheduled recess time), and the program feels your child should be sent home (this includes for head lice, ringworm, etc.), **you the parent/guardian**, are responsible for seeing that they are returned home. Unfortunately, neither the County, VMC nor the transporter can make these arrangements for you.



## **Introduction**

This *Transportation Handbook* is designed to provide parents/guardians with some information concerning your child's transportation. It also gives you the telephone numbers to call for more information and assistance. Transportation policies and procedures are also discussed. If you review this information and follow these simple rules, we can all be assured that your child's safety and comfort will not be jeopardized at any time.

## **Who to Call for All Transportation Questions**

Niagara County, through contracts with transportation providers (transporters), makes sure that all children who are in the Children with Special Needs Program (Program) are taken to and from their *authorized* schools and special services programs as deemed appropriate by the Board of Education. VMC Group, Inc., will oversee this process to ensure that all safety practices are followed by the transporters while they are taking care of your child.

## **Parent/Caregiver Absence at Vehicle Arrival Time**

- ♦ **It is the parent/guardian's responsibility to ensure that an adult is at home to receive the child at the scheduled drop-off time.**
- ♦ **In the event that no one is at home for drop off, the child will remain on the bus while the bus company attempts to contact the authorized alternate drop-off person and/or until the bus route is completed.**
- ♦ **In the event that the route is completed and no drop-off location has been secured, the bus company may contact the Police or Child Protective Services.**

**PLEASE CALL VMC FOR ALL TRANSPORTATION  
QUESTIONS at (716) 285-6000**

The Children with Special Needs Program is located at:

**Niagara County Health Department**

Trott Access Center  
1001 – 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Niagara Falls NY 14301

**Early Intervention Program**

Phone: (716) 278-1691

**Preschool Special Education**

Phone: (716) 439-7460

**Hours**

Monday through Friday  
8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The law requires the County to publicly invite all transporters to bid for transportation services provided by the Program. Before each session (Fall and Summer), you will be notified who the transporter for your child will be. You will also be told about any change in transporters.

All questions about transportation and any concerns you have about service should be directed to The VMC Group at (716)285-6000. The County tries to meet the needs of the parents/guardians, children and schools on a timely basis. However, we ask that you assist us in these efforts by following the procedures explained later in the Handbook.

***Parent/Guardian Responsibilities***

The Niagara County Health Department is committed to assuring that your child receives safe, comfortable and efficient transportation that gets your child to the Program on time. The following are simple rules and your cooperation in following these rules is greatly appreciated. Your child will not be released to anyone under the age of 14.

Unless a parent/guardian has given prior authorization, no child transported as part of this program will be picked up earlier than one and one-half hours before their program is to start. In addition, no child will be transported more than 50 miles (one way) to a program site without the prior approval of the Commissioner of Education. These regulations were instituted for the comfort of your child, and the County is pleased to comply with them.

***Extended Absences***

If your child will be absent for an extended period of time please notify your child's Program. The Program will send notice to VMC along with the date to resume transport. **If your child will not need transportation for any single day, you must notify your child's transporter by 6AM, or the day prior to absence, to cancel pickup.**

After ten (10) consecutive absences your child's program will reach out to your school district to notify them and conduct any necessary follow-up.

***Medical and Emergency Concerns***

Any medical or other pertinent information that might affect the safe transportation of your child must be presented at the Committee on Preschool Special Education meeting. This information will be maintained in strict confidence. In the event that during the year any issue arises that the transporter should be made aware of, the VMC Group should be called and appropriate arrangements will be made.

***Nursing on the Bus***

If it has been determined that your child requires a nurse on the bus, parents/guardians are responsible to notify the nursing agency if their child will be absent from school for the day. **You must call the nursing agency directly and notify them by 8pm the night before the absence.** If known in advance, you may leave a message with the child's name and date(s) of absence. Parents/guardians must let the nursing agency know if their child will be absent for an extended period of time. Parent/guardian must also notify the agency of other specifics or exceptions, if they apply (i.e. the child will ride to school on the bus, but not home, or vice-versa, etc.).

## **Drivers:**

All drivers serving this program are thoroughly screened. A background check includes: fingerprinting, references, licensing checks, reviews of driving records, and drug screening. These driver information reviews are conducted both at the time these people are hired and periodically thereafter. In addition, all drivers are required to have a physical examination prior to the start of service. All regular and substitute drivers must be at least 21 years old, and must have a Commercial Drivers License ("CDL"). They are required to wear photo ID badges. Drivers are also required to receive State approved safety and equipment training, and take yearly refresher courses. That program includes instruction in the management of special needs pupils, defensive driving, behind the wheel road testing and a required amount of classroom instruction.

## **Monitors:**

In various programs, monitors may be referred to as "aides" or "driver aides". Regardless of their designation, these are dedicated individuals who attend the vehicles to help ensure the safety and comfort of your child. The monitors must be at least 18 years old, wear photo badges and receive special education awareness training. They also must be trained in basic first aid. Their duties include the supervision of all children on their vehicles, assisting the children on and off the bus, assisting with car seats, seat belts and wheelchairs, and overseeing and reporting on the behavior of the children under their care. Monitors are also subjected to a stringent background check that includes fingerprinting, drug screening, the checking of references. They are trained in the use of all of the safety equipment that is required to be kept on their vehicles.

Please remember that neither the drivers nor the monitors are medical technicians, and they are neither qualified nor permitted to give your child medical attention.

## **Travel Time and Distance**

1. **Please have your child ready for pick up 10 minutes before the scheduled pick up time**, and watch for the arrival of the vehicle. By doing this, you can help ensure that your child and others are picked up on time.
2. Consult with your child's Program about whether they permit you to send medicine to school. If medications are to be administered during school hours they **must** be in a sealed, well marked pharmacy bottle and be handed to the driver for safe-keeping during transport.
3. **It is essential that an authorized person be available at all times to send and receive your child when they are picked up and/or dropped off.** If for any reason there is a change in the person meeting the bus, that change must be arranged **before your child starts their trip home** by telephoning your child's Program. The person meeting the bus must have ID, which can be presented upon request. (It is the Program that is responsible for telling the driver and VMC of the change when your child is placed on the vehicle for the return home.) This procedure is the only way that both you and we can be sure that your child is only released to an authorized person.
4. Parents/Guardians must complete an Alternate/Emergency Drop Off information sheet for each child being transported. This sheet is to be submitted to the school or program your child attends. For information about how to change this information and what changes can be accepted, see the *Pick Up/ Drop Off Change Orders* section of the Program Policies (on page 7). The place you name for the alternate or emergency drop off should be near where your child is usually dropped off and the emergency drop off must be available during bus times (the time your child would normally be dropped off). This will ensure every child on the bus will arrive home on time.
5. Please be sure that the information is updated regularly, and that your Program is notified of any change in address and/or telephone number.
6. If all attempts to contact a parent/guardian or an alternate/emergency drop off fail, the transporter is *required* to notify the Niagara County Department of Social Services Child Protective Services. Again, this is for your child's protection.

## ***Program Policies***

### ***General Safety***

We are doing everything possible to ensure the safety and comfort of your child while they are being transported. The County requires that all transporters comply with each Federal, State, County, City and Town rules and regulations. In addition, experience has taught us that other rules help to ensure your child's safety, and we require that the transporters comply with these rules also. The transporter provides curb-to-curb service **ONLY**, not door-to-door service.

### ***Parent/Guardian Reimbursement***

Niagara County will offer mileage reimbursement to parents/guardians who choose to transport their children to Program. This reimbursement will be paid at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) standard mileage rate for a maximum of one round trip per day. Information regarding reimbursement procedures will be provided directly to the parents/guardians.

### ***Weather/Snow Emergencies***

Each individual school district makes its own decision as to whether or not it wishes to hold classes on a day when there are questionable weather conditions. School authorities will notify local radio and TV stations regarding emergency closings. These radio and TV stations will usually broadcast information concerning school closings prior to 7:00 a.m. The absence of an announcement that an individual school facility or school district is closed means that classes will be in session that day.

If the school district where your child lives is closed, or if the school district in which the Program your child attends is closed, no transportation will be provided. Also, if your child's transportation route must cross school district lines from a district which is closed to one which is not (or vice versa), the transporter will use its best discretion as to whether it is safe to transport your child. If the transporter determines that safety requires transportation be cancelled, it will notify both the school district and all affected parents as soon as possible.

## ***Equipment***

### ***Car Seats***

All children under the age of four **must** be restrained in an appropriate child restraint seat. Traditional car seats are provided by the transporter, but if your child needs a specialized car seat for children with special needs, it is your responsibility to provide it. The transporter is responsible for making sure this specialized equipment meets all legal standards, and that the drivers and monitors are taught how to use it. It is the parent's responsibility to make sure that specialized equipment is kept clean and in working order.

### ***Buckling Up of Seat Belts***

The driver and/or monitor is responsible for buckling a child in a seat belt. Before beginning the operation of the vehicle, the driver is responsible for ensuring that each child's seat belt is securely fastened.

### ***Wheelchairs***

If your child requires a wheelchair, you must provide it. When your child was enrolled for their Program and you told us about the need for this, we arranged for your child to ride on a wheelchair accessible vehicle. The transporter is responsible for making sure that the necessary wheelchair restraints will be on the vehicle.

### ***Drivers and Monitors***

While your child is on their vehicle, your child's safety, security and comfort are in the hands of the vehicle's driver and monitor. For this reason Niagara County makes every effort to ensure that these individuals are fully qualified. Background checks are made of each driver and monitor who is being trusted with the care of your child, and in-depth training is provided.

Also, if on any occasion there is no one available to receive your child and all information concerning emergency drop off points has failed to locate an authorized, responsible person, there will be no choice but to contact the Police and/or Child Protective Services.

### ***"Reasonable" Emergency/Alternate Drop Off Points***

In order to make sure that the bus routes stay the same every day, and that your child – and everyone else's children – get home on time, designated emergency drop off points should be within a "reasonable" distance from a child's regular drop off point. While a "reasonable" distance does not require that the emergency drop off point be next door, "reasonable" distances cannot be several miles away. Please review your designated emergency/alternate drop off points at this time, and from time-to-time, to be sure that they meet the guidelines that we've discussed.

In case you have any questions about these and the following Policies and Procedures, and in order to let us know about Emergency Drop Off requirements, please contact VMC at the following telephone number and address. VMC will be pleased to assist you in any way they can within these guidelines.

**VMC Group, Inc.  
9701 Niagara Falls Blvd., Suite 1-A  
Niagara Falls NY 14304  
(716) 285-6000**

**Hours:  
Monday through Friday  
7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**



### ***Session Start Up***

Before the start of transportation services for the summer and fall school year programs, drivers are required to complete what we call a "dry run" of all routes, and to notify the parents of their child's approximate pick up time. Your child should be ready 10 minutes before the pickup time. The driver cannot wait more than three (3) minutes at each stop to ensure arrival at Program on time. (Drivers/Monitors cannot leave the vehicles to knock on doors.) If possible, the driver will make this notification in person (this is encouraged because it gives you an opportunity to meet this dedicated person who will be assisting your child). If no one is home when the driver visits, written notification will be left at your home. If you have not heard from your transporter within two days prior to your child's session start up, please call the Bus Company that is assigned to transport your child.

### ***Pick Up/Drop Off Change Orders***

Transportation is provided once daily to and once daily from your child's special needs service or program. Unless there are special reasons, transportation will be provided *from* the same location each day of the week, and *to* the same location each day of the week. However, where we normally pick your child up to go to school and where we drop them off after school can be different places, as long as the pick up place is the same every day and the drop off place is the same every day.

Because short term pick up and drop off changes have a bad effect on all of the children on a route, the County cannot accommodate such changes. Long term pick up and drop off changes (meaning those that will be in place for months) will normally require up to five days, from the date of the request, to be put in place – unless, of course, there are special circumstances or vehicle requirements. As mentioned earlier, we all try to work with you in meeting your reasonable requests.

***If your child will be absent on any single day  
you must notify your child's transporter by 6AM,  
or the day prior to absence, to cancel pickup.***

**Please be advised that dependent on location of your home, the location of the agency and hours of operation your child will be attending, it MAY be that your child is on the bus for an extended period of time, each way. While every effort will be made to keep travel time to a minimum, some children MAY be on the bus up to 90 minutes per trip.**

All requests for changes in your child's transportation must be made in writing on a **Change Order** form that is available at your child's program facility. This form is used to give information about changes such as your child's address, pick up and/or drop off points, session time, and other very important information. Use of this form is the only accurate way that you can tell the County, the transporter, VMC and your child's program about these changes. It is also the only way to make sure that your child will be picked up and dropped off when and where they should be.

### ***Permanent Changes***

*These changes must be made through your child's school or program:*

Each notification (*Change Order* form) of a permanent change, will be sent by your child's program to VMC for processing – after it has been signed. These changes may take up to five days to arrange, and possibly longer if special equipment, a new route, or other County approved changes need to be made (examples – changes needing County approval are those which change a school district, program, or the number of program hours, all of which require changes in your child's IFSP or IEP).

When making a change of this kind please remind your child's program to forward the *Change Order* form to VMC as quickly as possible.

### ***Short Term or Casual Changes***

Transportation will be provided as originally arranged by the Committee on Preschool Special Education, with consistent pick up and drop off points. Short term or casual changes cannot be made because they require a lot of rescheduling of the bus routes. They disrupt the transportation of all of the other children on that bus route. That makes it more difficult to keep the service standard that everyone wants to provide your child and the other children in the program.

### ***Emergency Pick Up and Drop Off***

Emergency pick ups will not be accommodated without special permission from VMC because it would disrupt many other children's transportation. Therefore, any request for an emergency change of your child's pick up point or time should be telephoned directly to VMC at the number shown inside the front cover of this Handbook.

Emergency drop offs need to be handled in the same way, with a telephone call made to VMC so that we can find a way to help with this kind of request.

Please understand that "emergencies" are last minute problems that make it absolutely impossible for you to be at home to send or to receive your child. "Johnny's sister needs to be taken to the doctor with 104° fever" is such an emergency. "My beautician is running late for my appointment" *is not such an emergency*.

Parents/guardians have the responsibility for making sure that your child is received at home by you or someone else who is *authorized*. The transporter cannot hold your child on the bus until you get home. Also the bus driver cannot wait in front of your door for an authorized, responsible person to receive your child. As you know, when no one is home to receive your child, it puts your child in danger. We have already talked about what we are required to do if we cannot locate you or your designated alternate or emergency contact. VMC will always try to assist when there is a real emergency; however, nobody has emergencies every week. If there are "emergencies" every week, steps will need to be taken to address your child's transportation service in the future.