



basic education

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Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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**TO: HEADS OF EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS
HEADS OF COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENTS
HEADS OF PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE
DISTRICT DIRECTORS
SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES
TEACHER UNIONS
ALL SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS
GOVERNING BODY ASSOCIATIONS**

CONTAINMENT/MANAGEMENT OF COVID 19 FOR SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

CIRCULAR NO. 1 OF 2020

Guidance for childcare facilities and schools on COVID-19

This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Guidance will be updated as new information emerges. Please check the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) website (www.nicd.ac.za) for updated guidance.

Schools can play an important role in efforts to control the spread of COVID-19. Schools can take steps to circulate information about the disease and its potential transmission within their school community. Schools can prepare to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among their learners and staff should health officials identify such a need.

School plans should be designed to minimise disruption to teaching and learning and protect learners and staff from social stigma and discrimination. Plans can build on everyday practices (e.g. encouraging hand hygiene, monitoring absenteeism and communicating routinely).

Who is this guidance for?

This interim guidance is intended to help administrators of childcare facilities and primary and high schools (hereafter referred to as schools) prevent the spread of COVID-19 among learners and staff.

Why is this guidance being issued?

Information provided should help schools understand how to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19 within school communities and facilities. It also aims to help schools react quickly should a case be identified. The guidance includes considerations to help administrators plan for the continuity of teaching and learning if there is a need to quarantine learners or staff within schools or close schools as a result of the spread of COVID-19.

What is the role of schools in responding to COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) virus, and we are learning more about it every day. There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. At this point, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes it. Stopping transmission (spread) of the virus through everyday practices is the best way to keep people healthy. More information on COVID-19 is available here www.nicd.ac.za; www.health.gov.za and www.education.gov.za.

Schools, working together with local health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of diseases to help ensure learners have safe and healthy learning environments.

To prepare for possible community transmission of COVID-19, the most important thing for schools to do now is **plan and prepare**. As the global outbreak evolves, schools should prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks as well as possible recommendations from health officials for learners, staff or whole classes or grades to be quarantined at home. School dismissal could be recommended in certain circumstances. Decisions about appropriate public health interventions should always be made in discussion with public health officials who have access to all the relevant information. These decisions include:

1. Whether learners or educators should remain home from school for a period of time; and
2. Whether learners in sections of a school or a whole school should be dismissed.

Keeping learners at home from school or closing schools is a serious decision which may restrict the learners' ability to acquire education as well as have knock-on effects in terms of the need for childcare. All decisions for learners to stay home from school based on possible exposure to or infection with COVID-19 should be justified by available scientific evidence.

Schools want to **be ready** if COVID-19 does appear in their communities.

School administrators can take steps to help stop or slow the spread of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19:

- **Make sure that everyone in the school has up to date information on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (link to NICD, www.nicd.ac.za, guidance on handwashing etc.)**
- **Monitor and plan for absenteeism**
 - Review attendance and sick leave policies. Encourage learners and staff to stay home when sick. Use flexibility, when possible, to allow staff to stay home to care for sick family members.
 - Discourage the use of perfect attendance awards and incentives as these may encourage people to come to school sick.
 - Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff.
 - Determine what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching and learning.
- **Establish procedures for learners and staff who are sick at school**
 - Establish procedures to follow when learners and staff become sick at school or arrive at school sick, as they should be sent home as soon as possible.
 - Keep sick learners and staff separate from well learners and staff until they can leave.
 - Remember that schools are not expected to screen learners or staff to identify cases of COVID-19. The majority of respiratory illnesses are not COVID-19. If

- a community (or more specifically, a school) has cases of COVID-19, local health officials will help identify those individuals and will follow up on next steps.
- Share resources with the school community to help families understand when to keep learners at home.
 - **Create communication plans for use with the school community.**
 - Include strategies for sharing information with staff, learners, and their families.
 - Include information about steps being taken by the school or childcare facility to prepare, and how additional information will be shared.

School administrators can also support their school community by sharing resources with staff, families and, age-appropriately, with learners. Consider sharing the following fact sheets and information sources found on the NICD website www.nicd.ac.za and the DBE website www.education.gov.za such as the Frequently asked Questions on COVID-19.

Learners who plan to travel, or have recently traveled, to areas with community spread of COVID-19. South Africa has not implemented any specific travel restrictions. While the risks of contracting COVID-19 infection are generally low and the consequences in most cases are mild, there are other associated risks of international travel. This includes cancelled flights, new travel restrictions and/or airport closures and possible quarantine in the event you come into contact with a suspected case. The risk of travel disruptions or acquiring COVID-19 in a foreign location varies by location and the risk situation is rapidly evolving. It is not possible to predict the level of risk in any location in the future. If members of school communities become infected during travel, they could potentially introduce COVID-19 into the community on return. The NICD has developed guidance on quarantine including guidance on appropriate precautions to take when returning from travel in affected countries and these should be followed (www.nicd.ac.za). In light of this, staff and learners who will be travelling internationally (including school tours) in the next months should reconsider the benefits and risks of undertaking such travel. Schools may need to postpone or cancel trips that could expose learners and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19. Learners returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance on the NICD website. **Schools can also consult with local health officials or call the NICD community hotline to discuss travel concerns 0800 029 999.**

Learners who may have been exposed to a suspected case of COVID-19. If anyone has been in contact with a suspected case in a childcare facility or school, no restrictions or special control measures are required while laboratory test results for COVID-19 are awaited. There is no need to close the setting or send other learners or staff home. As a precautionary measure, the NICD are currently testing a very large number of people who have travelled back from affected countries, the vast majority of whom test negative. Therefore, until the outcome of test results is known there is no action that staff members need to take.

Learners who may have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19. All close contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 case are required to self-quarantine at home for 14 days while being monitored for symptoms. They may not attend school. Learners who are not contacts of a confirmed case should not be prevented from attending school. Family and friends who have not had close contact with the original confirmed case do not need to take any precautions or make any changes to their own activities such as attending childcare or educational settings or work, unless they become unwell. Specifically learners who have interacted with a healthy contact of a confirmed case should not be excluded from school. The reason for this is that asymptomatic spread of COVID-19, if it occurs is likely very uncommon. Meaning, for a person who comes into contact with a healthy contact of a case, it is very unlikely to result in transmission. All case contacts who become symptomatic will be immediately screened for COVID-19 and if found to be a case, active contact tracing and self-quarantine of all contacts will be implemented.

Action to be taken when a case of COVID-19 (Learner or staff) is confirmed in your childcare facility or school

- The childcare or educational institution will be contacted by the relevant public health officials to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and advise on any actions or precautions that should be taken. If you have not yet been contacted please contact the public hotline 0800 029 999 who will refer you to the relevant contact.
- An assessment of each childcare or education institution will be undertaken by the public health officials with relevant staff. Advice on the management of learners and staff will be based on this assessment.
- If there is a confirmed case, a risk assessment will be undertaken by the educational establishment with advice from the public health officials. In most cases, closure of the facility or school will be unnecessary. This decision will be facility or school specific, based on various factors such as establishment size and pupil mixing.

Prepare for possible school dismissal. This should only be considered following recommendations from a public health official.

Temporarily closing schools is a possible strategy to stop or slow the further spread of COVID-19 in communities. School administrators should work in close collaboration and coordination with health officials to make dismissal and large event cancellation decisions. Schools are not expected to make decisions about dismissal or canceling events on their own. Schools can seek specific guidance from health officials to determine if, when, and for how long to take these steps. Large event cancellations or school dismissals may be recommended for 14 days, or possibly longer if advised by local health officials. The nature of these actions (e.g., scope, duration) may change as the local situation evolves.

During school dismissals, childcare programmes and schools may stay open for staff members (unless ill) while learners stay home. Keeping facilities open will allow educators to develop and deliver lessons and materials remotely, thus maintaining continuity of teaching and learning. Furthermore, it would allow other staff members to continue to provide services and help with additional response efforts.

If schools are dismissed, schools can consider the following steps:

- **Temporarily cancel extracurricular group activities and large events.**
 - Cancel or postpone events such as field trips, and sporting events.
- **Discourage learners and staff from gathering or socialising anywhere.**
 - Discourage gatherings at places like a friend's house, a favourite restaurant, or the local shopping mall.
- **Ensure continuity of education.**
 - Review continuity plans, including plans for the continuity of teaching and learning. Implement e-learning plans, including digital and distance learning options as feasible and appropriate.
 - If necessary, determine, in consultation with school district officials or other relevant state or local partners:
 - How to convert face-to-face lessons into online lessons and how to train educators to do so;
 - How to triage technical issues if faced with limited IT support and staff;
 - How to encourage appropriate adult supervision while learners are using distance learning approaches; and
 - How to deal with the potential lack of learners' access to computers and the Internet at home.

- **Ensure continuity of meal programmes, if applicable.**
 - Consider ways to distribute food to learners through the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP); and
 - If there is community spread of COVID-19, design strategies to avoid distribution in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd. Consider options such as “grab-and-go” bagged lunches or meal delivery.

How to clean educational establishments where there were learners, staff or others with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Coronavirus symptoms are similar to a flu-like illness and include cough, fever, or shortness of breath. Once symptomatic, all surfaces that the suspected case has come into contact with must be cleaned using disposable cloths and household detergents.

These include:

- all surfaces and objects which are visibly contaminated with body fluids; and
- all potentially contaminated high-contact areas such as toilets, door handles, telephones, etc.

Public areas where a symptomatic individual has passed through and spent minimal time in (such as corridors) but which are not visibly contaminated with body fluids do not need to be specially cleaned and disinfected. If a person becomes ill in a shared space, these should be cleaned as detailed above.

What to do with rubbish in the educational establishment, including tissues, if learners, staff or others within the institution become unwell with suspected COVID-19

All waste that has been in contact with the individual, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full. The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied. It can then be put in the normal waste.

Below follows the contact details of the Provincial Health Department Communicable Diseases Directorates:

Provincial Communicable Disease Control Directorate			
Eastern Cape	Thomas Dlamini Nosimpiwo Mgobo	thomas.dlamini@echealth.gov.za Nosimpiwo.Mgobo@echealth.gov.za	083 378 0189 060 579 9027
Free State	Dikeledi Baleni Babsy Nyokong	balenid@fshealth.gov.za nyokongb@fshealth.gov.za	083 757 8217 082 463 7499
Gauteng	Chika Asomugha Caroline Kesebilwe	Chika.Asomugha@gauteng.gov.za Caroline.kesebilwe@gauteng.gov.za	082 330 1490 083 490 8165
KwaZulu-Natal	Premi Govender	premi.govender@kznhealth.gov.za	071 609 2505
Limpopo	Marlene Freda Ngobeni Mashudu P. Mudau	Marlene.Ngobeni@dhsd.limpopo.gov.za Prudence.Mudau@dhsd.limpopo.gov.za	079 491 1909 071 678 3864
Mpumalanga	Mandla Zwane Hluphi Mpangane	MandlaZw@mpuhealth.gov.za hluphim@mpuhealth.gov.za	082 229 8893 076 522 8511 / 013 766 3411
North West	Chriseldah Lebeko	clebeko@nwpg.gov.za	082 421 7985
Northern Cape	Gloria Hottie	hottieg@webmail.co.za	072 391 3345 / 053 830 0529
Western Cape	Charlene Jacobs	Charlene.Jacobs@westerncape.gov.za	072 356 5146 / 021 483 9964
Port Health and Environmental Health			
Central Region (Gauteng, Free State, Northern Cape)	Funeka Bongweni	Funeka.Bongweni@health.gov.za	012 395 9728 060 993 0107
Northern Region (Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West)	Ockert Jacobs	Ockert.Jacobs@health.gov.za	012 395 9417 082 372 0556
Coastal Region (KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, Western Cape)	Antoinette Hargreaves	Antoinette.Hargreaves@health.gov.za	031 301 0381 083 460 0935

It is imperative that school communities are aware of the basic health and safety precautions as mentioned throughout the circular. This circular must be implemented immediately within all South African schools and applies to all entities and individuals that may come within the school premises.

Provincial Education Departments are obliged to ensure compliance as well as that resources are made available to secure schools and protect the health of school communities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'HM Mweli', written in a cursive style.

MR HM MWELI
DIRECTOR-GENERAL
DATE: 11/03/2020