

Frequently Asked Questions about Safe School Reopening

1. Where can I access health guidelines for education institutes:

- Comprehensive national health guidelines for education institutes have been developed and are available on <http://covid.gov.pk/guideline> and <http://www.mofept.gov.pk>

Additionally all schools will also display key messages on the school premises and may have school specific guidelines on their websites or shared with parents.

Specific guidelines for Higher Education Institutes issued by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) are available on their website <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/Pages/Covid-19-Guidance.aspx>

Special Education Department has also prepared specific guidelines for special education institutes that will be available on their website at <http://www.dgse.gov.pk>

2. Can reopening schools result in increased cases of COVID and how to avoid the spread of Corona:

- Evidence from other countries where schools have reopened has shown that there can be an increase in COVID-19 cases. School reopening results in a large intermingling of adults and children involved in the education sector. There are more than 45 million students studying in various education institutes across Pakistan and millions of education related staff that are involved in teaching, management and operations of education institutes.

Three simple measures can prevent an increase in Corona cases:

- Wear a proper face mask
- Wash hands frequently, especially before leaving home and after arriving in school
- Maintain a safe distance from each other

3. What can parents do to support safe reopening of schools:

- Schools are an essential part of the community, ensuring children continue their academic progress in a safe manner requires the support of the parents and community as well as the school administration. Parents have an important role to ensure three important things:
 - a) Do not let children go to school if they show any signs of cough, fever or flu .
 - b) Make sure children leave home with a clean face mask and remind them to wear it in class and in the transport to school.
 - c) Teach the children to wash their hands frequently.
 - d) Keep the physical contact of school going children with elderly relatives to a minimum.

4. Should students and staff attend school if they have cough and fever which is not linked to COVID:

- No, If you have a fever or cough stay at home. The cases of COVID have gone down but the pandemic is still a threat.
- It is a safe practice to stay at home, if any of the COVID like symptoms are observed.

5. What is the role of School Councils/Parent Teacher associations and other such support mechanism:

- The committees comprising of parents, community members and school staff will play a vital role in ensuring parents feel encouraged and comfortable sending children back to school and that safe school protocols are followed on the school premises.
- School committee members are encouraged to meet outside the school premises or in open air, away from the children's classrooms.

6. Can any education institute be shut down after reopening:

- Yes. If there are any suspected/detected cases of Corona in the school premises or in the school vicinity, the school administration in consultation with the health department and district authorities can shut down the school or classroom (based on the number of cases).
- It is extremely important that the school administrations play a proactive role in detection and reporting such cases to control the spread of the pandemic.
- If a school does not follow the essential safety protocols they could be shut down temporarily till the safety procedures are adhered to.

7. What happens if the school is shut down because of a corona case inside the school or increase in positive cases in the locality:

- Please do not try to come to the school till the school is declared open.
- The school administration should reopen on the advice of the health department and thoroughly clean the school prior to reopening.
- Parents and students should get teaching assignments for the children if possible to continue the learning at home.

8. What activities have been cancelled in the school during the COVID Pandemic:

- The following activities have been cancelled due to Corona:
 - a) School assemblies
 - b) Sports and games requiring physical contact or proximity
 - c) School trip, melas and social events requiring large gatherings in close proximity.

9. Will children have a recess or lunch break:

- Schools will make a localized decision for short breaks based on the number of children and space available for children to have the break inside or outside the classroom.

10. Are visitors allowed on the school premises:

- Visitors are discouraged from visiting the school. Visitors should as a first priority call the administration and teachers. Only very essential visitors will be allowed by the Principal ensuring adherence to the wearing of a mask and social distancing. Essential visitors could include – health teams for random testing, monitoring teams sent by the education department or parents of a sick child who have come to pick them up.

11. Do schools require medical certificates for student or staff absenteeism:

- Schools will record absence of both students and staff, in case of a long absence the school can request a certificate for record keeping.

12. Day care and child care services:

- Recognizing that most of the education staff may be parents themselves and will require day care services when they rejoin employment, wherever available daycare facilities will be kept open to facilitate working parents.
- Day care facilities will adhere to the safety protocols.
- Children less than two years are not required to cover their faces.

13. Do the SOPs apply on school transport as well:

- Yes. School vans and buses have to follow all the SOPs of distancing, and ensuring all children and adults on the bus or van wear a mask. The density of the schools is kept low to reduce the pressure on transport.

14. Will cafeterias and canteens be open:

- The cafeterias and canteens will be open but are discouraged from cooking on the premises. Serving pre-packaged safe hygienic food is allowed.
- Parents are encouraged to give children lunch boxes with home cooked items.

15. What kind of a mask or face covering is required:

- A simple cloth covering with double layers and a string to tie it, is more than sufficient. This prevents droplets from one's mouth and nose to be transferred to another person and vice versa. Parents are encouraged to keep 2-3 sets of face covering for the children and wash them regularly. Do not allow children to exchange their masks. Use fabric that allows easy breathing.
- Simply take two rectangles of cotton fabric, preferably 10 by 6 inches. Stitch them together and fold the sides of the cloth with a needle and a thread. Attach a string or elastic band to form ear loops.

16. What if my school wants to continue with online learning:

- Very few schools may have full online facility for teaching and learning and the students may be fully equipped to take the classes online. In such rare cases it is entirely the decision of the school and parents to continue online learning from home.

17. Can schools use a blend of online and face to face teaching:

- It is entirely up to the school to determine the best teaching method for the students based on the situation and availability of resources.

18. Will Education institutes test all children and teaching staff for Corona:

- All children and staff will not be tested. Health teams and District authorities in consultation with school administration may carry out random sampling.
- However, all canteen contractors and their staff will have to ensure compliance with corona testing.

19. What is meant by lowering the density or De-Densification:

- This simply means reducing the number of people in a space to ensure safe physical distance protocols can be applied. In some schools the enrolments are very high and it may require the schools to reduce the number of children and staff present on a single day by staggering and phasing school attendance.

20. What is meant by phased or staggered opening of Education Institutes:

- Staggering and phasing are approaches to reduce the density of people inside the education institutes premises and allow for physical distancing of 6 feet inside the classroom. It is the institute's decision to stagger according to their enrolment and availability of spaces.
- For e.g. a school with an average class size of less than 20 children and with ample space to allow for a 113 square feet space per child may not require to stagger the enrolment. However, a high enrolment school with above 30 students per class and less space may need to divide the enrolments across the days and adjust the time table.

21. Should the schools keep the windows and doors closed:

- Schools are encouraged to keep windows and doors open to allow for movement of air and if weather allows use open spaces as well.

22. What should a school do if a staff or student appears to have flu-like or COVID-19 symptoms after they have arrived:

- Schools should have an isolation area/room inside the school premises. The person/s experiencing the symptoms should be respectfully asked to wait in the area, wear a mask and wait for a caregiver to take them home.
- If symptoms are severe, please refer a nearby health service. The staff helping the person with the symptoms should keep their distance, wear a mask and

immediately wash hands after the interaction. The isolation area should also be cleaned immediately after the suspected case has left. All this is necessary to stop the spread of the virus.

23. Are teachers required to wear face masks:

- Yes all teachers and non-teaching staff have to wear face masks.

24. Will my child have to go to school every day:

- Schools are encouraged to reduce the density in the schools and based on the ground realities the schools will decide the time table. Please ask your children's teachers to provide the timetables.

25. School year is reduced because of the long closure of schools due to Corona, will my child miss out on learning:

- Schools have prepared shortened syllabus based on the number of days available. The school will select the most important skills required for learning in that grade and focus on them first.
- Schools have been encouraged to initiate remedial classes for students who may have difficulty in catching up with the learning.
- Parents and caregivers will have to play an important role in encouraging self-study.

26. What about board exams for children appearing in 2021 for grades 9, 10, 11 and 12 grades.

- At this time exam schedule of 2021 is being discussed by the boards across the country. A consideration to extend exams by two weeks is under discussion, however a final decision will be communicated widely after a national consultation.
- Exams for lower grades, 8 and below, will be announced by the respective schools and their authorities.