



GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL RE-OPENING DURING COVID-19

For Safe and Healthy Schools
JANUARY 2021

A RESILIENT EDUCATION
SYSTEM

**Ghana Education
Service**

Message from the Director-General, GES

As the Ghana Education Service prepares to re-open our schools for all learners (pupils/students), I want to assure all stakeholders, including parents and guardians, of our preparedness to support the provision of good quality education to all of our learners, even in these times of COVID-19.

Our goal, in these times, is to provide quality education within a healthy and safe environment. At the same time, we will continue to build a more resilient education system that will ensure continuous learning for our learners even during emergencies.

These guidelines are part of measures that GES is putting in place to ensure that all our institutions remain safe. Through these guidelines, GES seeks to promote observance of ALL protocols of COVID-19 to make schools safe for learners, staff and education workers.

Let us remember that our health and safety should be dear to our hearts as we wear our face masks, wash hands with soap under running water and observe social distancing at all times.

On this note and on behalf of Ghana Education Service, I warmly welcome all learners, teachers and other workers back to school. May we all stay healthy and safe.

PROF. KWASI OPOKU-AMANKWA
Director-General

Purpose

Our determination, as a nation to beat this virus, is guided by the science and the evidence available. As we prepare to re-open our schools to allow learners to continue with their academic work, it is important that we establish broad guidelines for safe operation of our schools.

These Guidelines are to help Regional and District Directors of Education as well as Heads of Schools to operate safely in the country. It is important to note that the broad guidelines outlined in this document are a general guide and must be adapted, where necessary, to meet the peculiar situation of each Region, District or School in accordance with the protocols and directives for

the re-opening of schools. It is to also provide clear and concrete steps for safe operations through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19 in schools and other educational facilities. Maintaining safe school operations during re-opening period and beyond, if done well, can promote public health.

Fundamental principles

Our goal is to ensure that we keep learners, teaching and non-teaching staff safe at school. And to help stop the spread of this disease are:

- The Sick Stay Home: Learners, teachers and other staff who are sick or feel sick should not come to school.
- Enhanced Hygiene Protocols: Schools should enforce regular hand washing with soap under running water, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer and regularly disinfect, clean school surfaces like door handles, tables, chairs, etc.
- Face Masking: Schools should enforce the wearing of face mask at all times.
- Social Distancing Protocols: Schools should promote social distancing during school gatherings (assembly and worship sessions) and dining sessions.

General Conditions

Disinfection

- All schools will be disinfected prior to the arrival of learners and staff.
- Educational directorates should ensure that their facilities are disinfected.
- Regional and district directors should coordinate disinfection of schools.

Provision of WASH facilities

- Schools will be provided with handwashing facilities (e.g. Veronica buckets, soap, etc.) and hand sanitizers.
- School heads should liaise with District and Regional Directors for their WASH facilities.

Provision of Face masks

Learners and staff will be provided with re-usable face masks which must be worn at all times to, in and from school.

Provision of Face shields and Gloves

- Learners with hearing impairment and staff will be provided with age appropriate face shields to be worn at all times and supported by staff for safe keeping and cleaning.
- House mothers, caregivers and teachers must regularly inspect the face shields.
- Gloves will be supplied to caregivers/housemothers/attendants for schools for learners with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDDs).

Mapping of schools to health facilities

- Schools have been mapped to health facilities.
- Heads of schools should liaise with District Directors of Education to work with District Health Directorates to complete the mapping of schools to health facilities.
- Heads of schools should establish their direct emergency protocols with their health institutions, including the assignment of a healthcare professional to each educational institution.

Splitting of Classes

- As part of ensuring that schools observe the social distancing protocols, where class sizes are unbearably large, heads of schools must liaise with District Directorates of Education and other stakeholders for necessary action to be taken.

No mass gathering

In accordance with COVID-19 protocols, schools should observe the following:

- There should be no mass gatherings in school. For instance, gatherings such as school assemblies, worship sessions and other large group activities should be limited to the classrooms.
- Boarding schools should ensure that boarding activities are organized in batches to reduce overcrowding and to promote social distancing (e.g. during dining).
- Sporting, cultural events and other school social activities are suspended.

- For the avoidance of doubt, in-school religious activities may continue, subject to observance of COVID-19 safety protocols.

Schools not accessible to external groups

Until further notice, school premises should not be used by outside groups for events and activities, such as church services, funerals, weddings, and event receptions.

Visitors to schools

Upon arrangements with school authorities and following the COVID-19 safety protocols, parents and guardians can visit their children and wards.

Monitoring school attendance

- Heads of schools should regularly monitor enrolment and attendance.
- Heads of schools should regularly monitor the health conditions, safety and well-being of learners and staff.

General Protocols for School Heads

School heads should ensure that the following protocols are observed in the school:

- Thermometer guns or thermal scanners are available for checking and recording the temperatures of learners and staff on a daily basis before classes begin.
- Mandatory wearing of face masks at all times (No Face mask: No Entry Policy).
- Provision of hand washing facilities with running water and soap and/or FDA approved alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Provision of adequate waste management facilities (e.g. bins, cans, bin-liners and single-use tissues).
- Provision of adequate, clean toilet with hand washing facilities for learners and staff.
- Ensure regular cleaning and disinfection of the school, including toilet facilities.
- Ensure that trash is removed regularly and disposed safely.

- Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces, classrooms, workstations, canteens and other facilities.
 - Provide adequate ventilation.
 - Ensure that sitting arrangements in classrooms conform to social distancing protocols.
 - Follow established evacuation procedures (as outlined in Annex 1) to enable evacuation should a learner fall sick.
 - Display approved health promotion materials on COVID-19 at vantage points in the school.
 - Ensure that School canteens adhere to the protocols and preventive measures in Annex 2.
 - Discourage hand shaking, hugging and indiscriminate spitting in the school.
 - Form and train COVID-19 teams on Health Promotion and Prevention Measures, Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) protocols, and evacuation protocols.
 - The COVID-19 team should **call 112 or 311** for support to enable evacuation in case of fever, cough and difficulty in breathing during school hours.
 - Ensure that learners desist from sharing personal items like pencils, pens, erasers, sharpeners, rulers, books, water bottles, etc.
 - Discourage learners from touching surfaces and objects.
 - Ensure that learners desist from sharing face masks with friends.
 - Discourage learners from touching eyes and picking nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Learners with special educational needs (e.g. hearing impairment) and those with specific health conditions (e.g. asthma) should be encouraged to wear face masks and/or face shields at all times.
 - Educate learners to eat warm/hot foods to keep healthy.
 - Encourage learners to buy food from a hygienic and safe source.
 - Ensure that learners use their own bowls, plates and spoons at all times.
 - Encourage learners to cough or sneeze into tissues or bent elbows.
- NB: The Ghana Health Service, through its Health Promotion Division, will lead an institutional health education training to empower SHEP coordinators to conduct regular training for teachers and learners on personal hygiene as well as supervise adherence to safety protocols.**
- General Protocols for Boarding Schools**
- Dining halls should be kept clean always.
 - Attendance to dining halls should be in batches to promote social distancing.
 - Tables and benches in dining halls should be cleaned and disinfected after dining.
 - There should always be hand-washing facilities (e.g. Veronica Buckets or tippy taps) and soap to promote hand washing.
 - Pantry bowls, plates and utensils should be washed immediately with clean water and soap after use.
 - Cooks, pantry staff and food vendors should be medically screened for fitness and certified annually.
 - Cooks and pantry staff should adhere to good hygienic practices and always wear face masks and clean aprons with caps.
 - Avoid large gatherings and always maintain social distancing in classrooms, dormitories and staff common rooms, and in offices and on school compounds.
 - Sleeping arrangements in dormitories should be well spaced to promote social distancing.
- NB: There should be regular health awareness meetings by every House, where education on good hygiene is promoted and intensified.**
- Procedure for wearing face mask**
- Heads of schools should ensure that learners observe the following:
- Wash hands with soap under running water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - Place face mask over the bridge of nose.

- Fit the face mask tightly over the bridge of the nose and comfortably at the side of the face.
- Place the elastic bands of the face mask behind the ears (or tie the ropes of the face mask around the head).
- Stretch the mask downwards to cover the chin.
- Allow for breathing without restriction.
- Avoid touching the mask while using it; if done, clean hands with alcohol-based sanitizer or wash hands with soap under running water.
- Replace face mask with a new one as soon as it is wet and wash it after each use.

How to Care for Cloth Facemask

Heads of schools should ensure that learners observe the following:

- Cloth face masks should be washed daily.
- Remove face mask and put in a bowl of warm, soapy water.
- Wash face mask until clean, rinse under running water and dry it in the open sun.
- Iron face mask and seal it in a plastic bag until ready for use.
- Discard any damaged face mask.

Washing hands properly

Heads of schools should ensure that learners observe the following:

Step 1: Wet hands with clean running water.

Step 2: Apply enough soap to cover wet hands.

Step 3: Wash the hands (i.e. back of hands, in-between fingers and under finger nails for at least 20 seconds).

Step 4: Rinse hands thoroughly under running water.

Step 5: Dry hands with a clean, dry cloth, or with a tissue or a hand drier, as applicable.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS

Senior high schools

- On class size, District Directors and heads of schools should use their discretion to

address peculiar situations in their districts and schools.

- Learners are expected to maintain their residential status (boarding or day).
- Where additional facilities are available, students should be spread out in classrooms/dormitories to ensure social distancing.
- Each boarding school should have a room as an Isolation Centre in case a learner is to be isolated.
- School infirmaries should be opened at all times with a full-time nurse stationed to provide first-aid services.
- Each school is mapped to a health facility to which the school shall report any emergency.
- School programmes which bring an entire school together, like sports, cultural activities and assemblies are suspended, until further notice.
- Visits to schools by unauthorized persons are suspended.

Basic schools

- On class size, District Directors and heads of schools should use their discretion to address peculiar situations in their districts and schools.
- Social distancing and other safety protocols should be observed always.
- Lesson periods and breaks shall be as stipulated by GES and subject to the approved COVID-19 safety protocols.
- Visits to washrooms (i.e. toilets and urinals) should be regulated to promote social distancing and safety.
- Parents are encouraged to provide their children with food (e.g. snacks) when coming to school to minimize the movement of learners for food within and outside of the school premises.

Kindergartens

Heads of schools must ensure:

- Regular disinfection of furniture and other teaching/learning resources.
- Regular washing of hands with soap under running water.

- Care-giver support to children, especially those with special needs.
- Age-appropriate materials should be supplied.
- Frequent education on COVID-19.

COVID-19 DO's & DON'Ts FOR LEARNERS

DO's	DON'Ts
Always wear a face mask to cover your nose and mouth	Don't wear your face mask on your chin
Wash your cloth face mask daily	Avoid touching the front part of mask while using it
Wash your hands with soap under running water regularly	Don't wear a dirty face mask
Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently.	Don't share your face mask with anybody
Cover your mouth with a tissue or bent elbow any time you cough or sneeze	Avoid touching your nose, mouth or eye with unwashed hands
Observe personal hygiene	Don't litter the compound with used tissue
Dispose of used tissue into a bin	Don't shake hands or hug anyone
Keep a distance of at least 1 meter(3 feet) from a friend at all times	Don't share personal items with anybody
Stay on campus	Don't spit around
Inform house/hall master or mistress when unwell	Don't leave campus if not very necessary
Eat nutritious food with fruits and vegetables	Don't self-medicate when unwell
Register your name daily in the attendance register	Don't give names to people infected with COVID-19; show concern and love
Sleep well and avoid stress	Don't go to crowded places

GUIDE FOR PARENTS AT HOME

Per the President's directive, our children are scheduled to return to school though COVID is still with us. The children are excited about seeing their peers again. However, parents and school managers are anxious to get it right and ensure no child gets infected in school. We have a collective responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of our children and other children within the school

community. Here are some points to help in managing this unusual situation.

1. WEARING OF NOSE MASK:

- Engage your child at home and discuss the importance of wearing the nose mask whilst in school.
- Practice wearing the face mask at home to empower the child.
- Teach and practice how to remove and wear the nose mask properly.

2. HEALTH AND HAND HYGIENE:

- Discuss the importance of hand washing and the use of hand sanitizers.
- Practice proper hand washing at home as often as possible to sensitize your child and make hand washing feel normal.
- Discuss the fact that they should not touch surfaces with their hands.
- Discuss the need to avoid rubbing their eyes, picking their nose, biting their nails or putting fingers in their mouth to protect them from infection.
- Provide hand sanitizers in their school bag and tell them when to use it.
- Provide pocket tissue for the child's use when they have the urge to sneeze or cough. They should quickly dispose of it and wash their hands.

3. MAINTAIN PHYSICAL DISTANCE WHEN WITH FRIENDS:

- Reiterate the importance of not hugging.
- Assure them they can chat with their friends but should be in nose mask and walk beside their friends whilst chatting. They should not stand facing each other as much as possible.

- c. Always measure and be sure they are standing at an arm's length from their peers.

4. BOOST IMMUNE SYSTEM:

- a. Feed your child healthy food and ensure adequate daily intake of fruits and vegetables rich in vitamin C.
- b. Breakfast is a must before they get to school.
- c. Each child should sleep for about 8 to 10 hours.
- d. Ensure they get adequate rest at home, sleep early and wake up rested.

5. MENTAL WELLBEING:

- a. Reassure them they will be safe in school so far as they follow protocols and their teachers' instructions.
- b. Allow your child to ask questions and answer to the best of your ability.
- c. Minimize complaints and negative comments especially your dislike of the school going process.
- d. Our children are anxious so let us allay their fears and not fuel them.

6. COMMUNICATION:

- a. Keep your children safe with open communication.
- b. Create trusting relationships through positive supports and encouragement.
- c. Take time to adjust your message for your child's needs (children with learning disabilities).

7. BACK FROM SCHOOL PROTOCOL:

- a. Educate and supervise your child remove all clothes and put in the laundry basket for washing.

- b. Ensure cloth nose mask is removed to be washed and ironed before next use.
- c. Disinfect school bag, meal bags, learning devices and school supplies with home disinfectants or alcohol hand rub in a cloth or tissue.
- d. Child should bath as soon as uniforms are off before s/he wears home clothes or eat.

8. NOTE AND SUPPORT 'THE STAY HOME IF UNWELL POLICY'

- a. This will be implemented to the letter so we have a responsibility not to send an unwell to child to school.
- b. Know that your child even if s/he does not have COVID has some reduced immunity when unwell so will be at increased risk of contracting it if virus is lurking around in the school.

Annex 1 – Evacuation Procedures

Actions to be undertaken when dealing with a sick person:

- I. Obtain student's details (name/organization/contact person/immediate family member details including a phone number).
- II. Inform the student that they will be separated/ isolated due to symptoms.
- III. Minimize contact between the sick person and all other persons and direct to a pre-designated holding room.
- IV. The student must always wear a facemask and observe social distancing at all times.
- V. Teachers or the COVID team must **call 112 or 311** or link up with local district health authorities for immediate evacuation or medical help.

Annex 2 – School Canteens and Food Vendors

In addition to the general protocols, operators are mandated to do the following:

- I. Maintain frequent washing of utensils and sanitizing of all food contact surfaces.
- II. Require food service workers to frequently wash hands and if using gloves, these must be changed before and after preparing food.
- III. Require food service workers to have their health certificates and Hepatitis B test up to date.
- IV. Cleaning and disinfection procedures for equipment, premises, contact surfaces/ high touch points, e.g. countertops, tongs, service utensils, open self-service displays, and door handles.
- V. Observe social distancing when eating at the canteen.

Annex 3 – Cautions on Student Becoming Ill

In the event a student becomes ill while in school or develops a temperature >38°C during screening

- I. Quickly isolate the student in the designated holding room in the school.
- II. Notify the health authorities (district health authority)
- III. The health authorities will conduct clinical assessment, COVID-19 testing, case management and contact tracing (contact identification, listing and follow-up)
- IV. In the event the student tests positive for COVID-19, he/she will be sent to the treatment centre designated in the region for continuous case management.
- V. All contacts identified will be duly quarantined in the designated area in the school and COVID-19 testing will be carried out on them and subsequent health actions taken.
- VI. The classroom, dormitory, canteen, library, staff common room and any other space the student might have used in the past 48 hours prior to becoming ill will be disinfected immediately.
- VII. Risk communication activities will continue as stated in this protocol to educate and inform the students, teaching, and non-teaching staff.
- VIII. The processes and protocols outlined above will apply when a teaching or non-teaching staff becomes ill while in school.

In the event a student becomes ill while at home

- I. The parent/guardian of the student should immediately inform the school and the district health authority.

- II. The student should be isolated in an available room/space at home.
- III. The health authority will transport the student to a health facility for health care and COVID-19 test will be conducted on the student.
- IV. Further health care decisions will be taken based on the outcome of the test.
- V. The health authorities will conduct contact tracing and testing of contacts and further actions taken based on the outcome of tests.
- VI. While waiting for test results, contacts at home and school will be under quarantine and observation at designated areas either at home, in the school or any other place as determined by the health authorities.
- VII. Places in the home and school that will be suspected to have been contaminated will be disinfected within the most reasonable time space.
- VIII. The same processes and principles shall apply if a teaching or non-teaching staff becomes ill while at home.