

Covid-19 Pandemic Policy

I. FACTS ABOUT COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. 'CO' stands for corona, 'VI' for virus, and 'D' for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as '2019 novel coronavirus' or '2019-nCoV.' The COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms can include **fever, cough and shortness of breath**. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia or breathing difficulties. More rarely, the disease can be fatal. These symptoms are similar to the flu (influenza) or the common cold, which are a lot more common than COVID-19. This is why testing is required to confirm if someone has COVID-19.

How does COVID-19 spread?

The virus is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing). Individuals can also be infected from and touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and touching their face (e.g., eyes, nose and mouth). The COVID-19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours, but simple disinfectants can kill it.

Who is most at risk?

We are learning more about how COVID-19 affects people every day. Older people, and people with chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease, appear to be more at risk of developing severe symptoms. As this is a new virus, we are still learning about how it affects children. We know it is possible for people of any age to be infected with the virus, but so far there are relatively few cases of COVID-19 reported among children. This is a new virus and we need to learn more about how it affects children. The virus can be fatal in rare cases, so far mainly among older people with pre-existing medical conditions.

What is the treatment for COVID-19?

There is no currently available vaccine for COVID-19. However, many of the symptoms can be treated and getting early care from a healthcare provider can make the disease less dangerous. There are several clinical trials that are being conducted to evaluate potential therapeutics for COVID-19.

How can the spread of COVID-19 be slowed down or prevented?

As with other respiratory infections like the flu or the common cold, public health measures are critical to slow the spread of illnesses. Public health measures are everyday preventive actions that include:

- ✓ Staying home when sick
- ✓ Covering mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing. Dispose of used tissue immediately;
- ✓ Washing hands often with soap and water
- ✓ Cleaning frequently touched surfaces and objects

II. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and the virus has now spread to many countries and territories. While a lot is still unknown about the virus that causes COVID-19, we do know that it is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing) Individuals can also be infected from touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and touching their face (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth). While COVID-19 continues to spread it is important that communities take action to prevent further transmission, reduce the impacts of the outbreak and support control measures.

The protection of children and educational facilities is particularly important. Precautions are necessary to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 in school settings; however, care must also be taken to avoid stigmatizing students and staff who may have been exposed to the virus. It is important to remember that COVID-19 does not differentiate between borders, ethnicities, disability status, age or gender. Education settings should continue to be welcoming, respectful, inclusive, and supportive environments to all.

Measures taken by schools can prevent the entry and spread of COVID-19 by students and staff who may have been exposed to the virus, while minimizing disruption and protecting students and staff from discrimination.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear and actionable guidance for safe operations through the prevention, early detection and control of COVID-19 in schools and other educational facilities. The guidance, while specific to countries that have already confirmed the transmission of COVID-19, is still relevant in all other contexts. Education can encourage students to become advocates for disease prevention and control at home, in school, and in their community by talking to others about how to prevent the spread of viruses. Maintaining safe school operations or reopening schools after a closure requires many considerations but, if done well, can promote public health.

This guidance will help child care programs, schools, and their partners understand how to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19 within child care and school communities and facilities. It also aims to help child care programs, schools, and partners 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 community spread of COVID-19.

III. SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS AND STAFF

Basic principles

Following basic principles can help keep students, teachers, and staff safe at school and help stop the spread of this disease. Recommendations for healthy schools are:

- ✓ Sick students, teachers and other staff should not come to school
- ✓ Schools should enforce regular hand washing with safe water and soap, alcohol rub/hand sanitizer or chlorine solution and, at a minimum, daily disinfection and cleaning of school surfaces

- ✓ Schools should provide water, sanitation and waste management facilities and follow environmental cleaning and decontamination procedures
- ✓ Schools should promote social distancing (a term applied to certain actions that are taken to slow down the spread of a highly contagious disease, including limiting large groups of people coming together)

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

Schools, working together with DHA, have an important role in slowing the spread of diseases to help ensure students have safe and healthy learning environments. Schools serve students, staff, and visitors from throughout the community. All of these people may have close contact in the school setting, often sharing spaces, equipment, and supplies.

CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS AND STAFF

1. Promote and demonstrate regular hand washing and positive hygiene behaviours and monitor their uptake. Ensure adequate, clean and separate toilets for girls and boys
 - ✓ Ensure soap and safe water is available at age-appropriate hand washing stations
 - ✓ Encourage frequent and thorough washing (at least 20 seconds)
 - ✓ Place hand sanitizers in toilets, classrooms, halls, and near exits where possible
 - ✓ Ensure adequate, clean and separate toilets or latrines for girls and boys
2. Clean and disinfect school buildings, classrooms and especially water and sanitation facilities at least once a day, particularly surfaces that are touched by many people (railings, lunch tables, sports equipment, door and window handles, toys, teaching and learning aids etc.)
 - ✓ Use sodium hypochlorite at 0.5% (equivalent 5000ppm) for disinfecting surfaces and 70% ethyl alcohol for disinfection of small items, and ensure appropriate equipment for cleaning staff
3. Increase air flow and ventilation where climate allows (open windows, use air conditioning where available, etc.)
4. Post signs encouraging good hand and respiratory hygiene practices
5. Ensure trash is removed daily and disposed of safely

IV. STUDENTS AND CHILDREN

Children and young people should understand basic, age-appropriate information about coronavirus disease (COVID-19), including its symptoms, complications, how it is transmitted and how to prevent transmission. Stay informed about COVID-19 through reputable sources such as UNICEF, WHO and national DHA advisories. Be aware of fake information/myths that may circulate by word-of-mouth or online.

CHECKLIST FOR STUDENTS AND CHILDREN

1. In a situation like this it is normal to feel sad, worried, confused, scared or angry. Know that you are not alone and talk to someone you trust, like your parent or teacher so that you can help keep yourself and your school safe and healthy.
 - ✓ Ask questions, educate yourself and get information from reliable sources

2. Protect yourself and others
 - ✓ Wash your hands frequently, always with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
 - ✓ Remember to not touch your face
 - ✓ Do not share cups, eating utensils, food or drinks with others
3. Be a leader in keeping yourself, your school, family and community healthy.
 - ✓ Share what you learn about preventing disease with your family and friends, especially with younger children
 - ✓ Model good practices such as sneezing or coughing into your elbow and washing your hands, especially for younger family members
4. Don't stigmatize your peers or tease anyone about being sick; remember that the virus doesn't follow geographical boundaries, ethnicities, age or ability or gender.
5. Tell your parents, another family member, or a caregiver if you feel sick, and ask to stay home.

References:

WHO: Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools, Mar 2020
CDC: Mitigation strategies based on level of community transmission of COVID-19 and presence of COVID-19 cases within the school, Mar 2020
DHA: Appendix 1 Flowchart Case Definition for suspected 2019-nCov case and assessment

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