



# **Covid -19 Guidelines / Protocols for Returning to Schools in the Turks and Caicos Islands**



**Ministry of Education, Youth, Culture, Social and Library Services  
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## **COVID-19 - FACTS**

### **Defining 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 virus as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold.

### **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. This disease can be fatal. The symptoms of Covid -19 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.

### **The Spreading of COVID-19**

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, mouth). There is currently no evidence to support transmission of Covid -19 associated with food. The Covid -19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours, but simple disinfectants can kill it.

### **Persons most at Risk**

We are learning more about how Covid -19 affects people every day. Older people, and people with chronic and pre-existing 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 and other vulnerable groups. We know it is possible for people of any age to be affected 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.

## **Treatment for COVID-19**

There is currently no 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.

## **Preventing the spread of COVID – 19?**

As with other respiratory infections like the flu or the common cold, Public Health measures are critical to slow the spread of the illness. These preventive measures include:

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

As we learn more about COVID Public Health Officials may recommend additional actions.

*(Adapted Source - Lisa Bender: Education UNICEF NYHQ)*

## **Guidelines / Protocols for the Returning to Schools** **in the Turks and Caicos Islands**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

The Ministry / Department of Education, in its ongoing response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, uses this forum to release the following Guidelines/Protocols for the reopening of Primary and Secondary Schools in the Turks and Caicos Islands. These Guidelines are designed to promote the health and safety of all Administrators, Teachers, Students, Parents, Visitors and School Stakeholders. It is anticipated that these Guidelines will help to reduce the risk of Covid-19 exposure and spread during School sessions and activities. It is imperative that all Schools take the necessary precautions to prevent the transmission of this virus and follow closely prevention practices outlined by both the Ministries of Education and Health.

School Administrators must ensure that their School facilities are disinfected and clean thoroughly on a daily basis. The promotion of frequent handwashing and proper sanitation has to be institutionalized at all Schools. It is vital that we follow all of the necessary precautionary guidelines and protocols to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19 in our School settings.

This document therefore outlines such Protocols. It is designed to be flexible and can be adapted to each unique School context within the country. Indeed, it will be updated as the situation changes.

# **PROTOCOLS**

## **Protocol I – Reestablishing School Operations**

### **Entry Guidelines:**

- 1) Parents, Guardians and local Transport Operators are to remain at the gate for dropping students off, picking them up, or for any other need;
  - Non-essential visitors must be restricted, e.g., call or email for meeting and in cases of emergency.
  - Maintenance work should be completed after school hours
  - All approved visitors (example: must remain at the school's gate with the School Warden or a Security Guard until given clearance to proceed to the Principal's office;
  - Everyone entering the school compound must be sanitized using 70% alcohol sprayed on the hands or with hand sanitiser from a dispenser.
  - Everyone entering the school compound must have their temperature checked using a non-contact digital laser thermometer (Temperature Gun)
  - Everyone entering the school compound must wear a face mask or face covering which does not prevent the Security Officer from recognising facial features.
  - In addition to the Attendance Register, a daily record must be kept of everyone entering the school compound along with the purpose of the visit

### **In School Guidelines:**

- 2) Rotation of Staff and Students (possibly in larger schools);
- 3) Staggered scheduling and timetables in each school will be modified to accommodate extra time for dropping students off and the use of shared social spaces – *i.e. the Restrooms*;
- 4) Administration is required to closely monitor staff and student absenteeism and to create a Roster of trained back-up staff, in the event it is needed;
  - Staff and students must produce a medical certificate for health-related absences before being allowed to continue school

- Supply/Temporary teachers to be engaged where feasible
  - Schools should keep a log of absences of staff and students
- 5) Staff and students are to remain at home if they are sick;
- Wearing a face mask or facial covering while in the classroom will be guided by the Ministry of Health guidelines
  - Frequently used areas and surfaces should be cleaned at least three times a day.
- 6) All Schools are required to designate a member of Staff to receive and respond to COVID-19 related matters. The entire School Family must know who this person is;
- Schools should recruit a school nurse where feasible
- 7) All Schools are required to review their School Disaster Management Plans and make the add the necessary protocols to response to Covid-19 cases/situation on the school Compound;
- 8) All Schools are required to prepare a Contingency Plan in the case of an outbreak that results in the closure of the Schools.
- 9) School must prepare Business Continuity Plans in case of an escalation in Covid-19 cases resulting in the closure of schools
- Post signs in highly visible locations (e.g. school entrances, restrooms) that promote everyday protection measures
  - Refuse must be removed on a daily basis and disposed in accordance with guidelines form the Ministry of Health

## Checklist for Teachers

### Teachers: Get Your School Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019

You can protect yourself and your students by practicing and promoting healthy habits during the school year. Use this checklist to plan and take action if a COVID-19 outbreak occurs in your community.

#### PLAN AND PREPARE

- Encourage students to stay home if sick.
  - » If your student gets sick at school, keep the sick student away from well students until picked up. Encourage your student to stay home if they are sick with any illness.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects in the classroom.
  - » [Follow CDC's guidance for cleaning and disinfecting community facilities, such as schools.](#)
- Monitor absenteeism.
  - » Let administrators know if you see a large increase in absenteeism.
- Talk to your administrators about plans for teaching through digital and distance learning.

#### IF YOUR SCHOOL IS DISMISSED

- Implement a plan to continue educating students through digital and distance learning (*if applicable*).
- Seek guidance from your school administrator to determine when students and staff should return to schools.

Duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis based on the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the specific situation in your community. Students and staff should be prepared for durations that could last several days. Administrators should work with their local health authorities to determine duration of dismissals.

### Protocol II – Promoting Health and Safety Measures

- 1) A Nurse, the Guidance Counsellor, Teacher, Security Officer or a designated member of staff will conduct daily temperature checks;
- 2) The wearing of face masks or coverings must be observed from the time staff, students, parents and visitors enter the school compound;
- 3) Additional cleaning staff will be employed to secure cleaning between sessions (emphasizes will be placed on all and frequently used surfaces around the school compound);
- 4) Ensure that all water systems and features are operational and safe;
- 5) Hand sanitizing stations should be erected at various locations on the School Compound;



- 6) Schools must ensure that all ventilation systems are properly working. Outdoor air (opening of doors and windows) circulation must be increased as much as possible, if no risk is present;
- 7) Restrooms should be cleaned and constantly monitored throughout the day to ensure they remain in a hygienic state;
- 8) Solid waste must be removed daily; Wastepaper bins in classrooms must be emptied daily;
- 9) Avoid as much as possible the sharing of items in the classroom, especially items which are difficult to clean;
- 10) Students are required to take to school their own books and school tools. Sharing of these items must be discouraged;
- 11) Sharing of food should be actively discouraged;
- 12) Students and staff should be discouraged from bringing cloth face towels on to the school compound.
- 13) Drinking/Water Fountains should be sanitized and cleaned frequently. Staff and students must be encouraged to bring their own drinking water to minimize use and touching of the Water Fountains;
- 14) Health and Safety signs and messages must be posted in visible areas around the school Compound that promote protective measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19;
- 15) Communal spaces such as the playground and lunch sheds must be closed to all students;
- 16) A Quarantine Room must be identified for use in each School to isolate and treat students and staff alike if necessary.
- 17) The health and well-being of children and staff should be prioritised. ECCE centre/Nursery Class management should ensure that they have information to share with parents and staff members in the event counselling or mental health support is required.
- 18) Staff should be vigilant when caring for children to notice any signs of difficulties the child may be experiences with regards to health and well-being. The relationship between children and adults in the ECCE centre upon reopening is especially important.

# CLEANING AND DISINFECTING SCHOOLS & EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES\*\*

**21 July 2020**

This guidance provides recommendations on the cleaning and disinfecting of schools and early childhood centres amidst the recent emergence of the COVID-19 disease. The Ministry of Health, Environmental Health Department will update this guidance as needed and as additional information become available. These guidelines are focused on schools (private and public) and ECD Centres,

## **Background:**

COVID-19 is an emerging respiratory disease caused by a novel coronavirus that has spread worldwide. COVID-19 is primarily transmitted via respiratory droplets through coughing, sneezing and talking; and touching contaminated surfaces. The signs and symptoms of COVID-19 are very similar to that of other respiratory illness. They include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, and shortness of breath; in severe cases it may cause pneumonia, severe respiratory syndrome, organ failure and even death. As the COVID-19 outbreak evolves, the Environmental Health Department encourages schools and early childhood centres to prepare for possible impact of COVID-19 and take precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Current evidence suggests that COVID-19 may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made of a variety of materials thus, cleaning and disinfecting is the best practice for prevention. Routine cleaning and disinfection are essential however, intensification of cleaning and disinfecting is extremely important amidst the recent emergence of COVID-19.

## **Cleaning vs. Disinfecting**

- **Cleaning** is the removal of visible dirt or particles done on a routine and continual basis.

This is typically done using detergent and water.

- **Disinfecting** is the killing or destruction of germs (bacteria, viruses, fungi) on surfaces using physical or chemical means. There must be compliance of contact time when using a chemical disinfectant.

## **What to Clean and Disinfect**

*Hand Contact Surfaces* - toys, changing tables, desks, knobs, chairs, counters, sinks, cots, toilets, faucets, mattresses, light switches, remotes, etc.

*Non-Hand Contact Surfaces* – floors, ceilings, etc. Linens- clothing, sheets, etc.

## **How to Clean and Disinfect**

- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning and disinfecting.
- If surfaces are dirty, they should first be cleaned using a detergent (soap) and water.
- After cleaning, surfaces should be disinfected using a disinfectant.
- For disinfection, regular household solution and/or EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. Be certain to use suitable disinfectant for appropriate surfaces.
  - o A standard recommendation is 1/4 cups of bleach to 1 gallon of water.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfecting products.

- Do not shake dirty laundry; this minimises the possibility of dispersing the virus through the air.
- Wash items using the warmest appropriate water setting and dry items completely.
- Clean and disinfect hampers for transporting laundry according to the guidance for surfaces above.

## **When to Clean and Disinfect**

The frequency of cleaning and disinfecting is dependent on what is being cleaned and disinfected.

- Hand-Contact Surfaces may need to be cleaned and disinfected weekly, before use by a different child, after each child's use, daily (at least 3 times a day) and/or immediately if visibly soiled.
- Non-hand Contact Surfaces may need to be cleaned and disinfected daily.
- Linens may need to be cleaned weekly, before use by a different child, or immediately if visibly soiled.

## **Who should clean and disinfect:**

Staff should be identified and trained to perform cleaning and disinfecting procedures.

Use of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE):

- Staff should wear disposable gloves when cleaning and handling garbage.
- Gloves should be removed carefully to avoid contamination of the wearer and the surrounding area.
- Immediately after gloves are removed, hands must be washed.

## **Hand Hygiene:**

- Staff must clean hands frequently, including after removing gloves, after contact with an ill person, after using the bathroom, before eating or preparing food, between task and between child, after blowing nose, sneezing or coughing, etc.
- Hands must be washed with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitiser with an alcohol content of at least 70% may be used.

*\*\*BVI School Reopening Guidelines pages 11-14*

### **Protocol III – Promoting Social Distancing**

- 1) There shall be no General Assembly (morning devotions) until otherwise notified;
- 2) Only classroom assembly shall be permitted;
- 3) Where students line up to enter class, they should be encouraged to keep 6 feet between each other where possible.
- 4) Where students usually enter and leave class in an unstructured manner, this practice should be changed so students enter in a more structured way, so as to maintain a distance of 6 feet apart.
- 5) Classrooms should be arranged or organized to as to achieve maximum seating with desks and chairs no fewer than 6 feet apart; The size of the classroom could mean some classes may have more seating capacity than others;
- 6) Staff and students must refrain from physical greetings (no touching – handshakes and hugging should be strongly discouraged);
- 7) Enforce the wearing of face mask, or facial covering, at all times while on the compound. Failure to comply will result in student not being allowed on the compound. The wearing of face masks or facial covering while in classes will be guided by the Ministry of Health;
- 8) Gatherings and groupings of more than 4 persons should be discouraged;
- 9) Breaks and time outside should be staggered, if staffing allows, to limit contact between groups.
- 10) Student group work in schools should be suspended, except where students are collaborating using digital technologies.
- 11) Except for very young students, a student’s work should either be handed to the teacher for feedback or transmitted via ICT devices rather than feedback being provided immediately by the teacher in close proximity to the student.
- 12) All Special Education students should be placed with Special Education Teachers or teachers who are trained to facilitate their learning and social emotional needs;
- 13) Secondary school students are to remain in their homerooms for all sessions (except for detailed practical sessions);

- 14) When students must leave their homeroom for a practical session in a laboratory, care must be taken to have the students leave the homeroom enroute to the laboratory in single file, six (6) feet apart.
- 15) In a classroom, desks and chairs must be turned to face the same direction, or students must sit on only one side of the table, spaced apart (especially in Kindergarten classes)
- 16) Assign a specific desk and chair to each student. This desk and chair should always be used by the same student. Where this is not feasible, the desk and chair must be cleaned and disinfected (see cleaning guidelines above) before it is used by another student.
- 17) There should be no sporting events, clubs or field trips until otherwise notified;
- 18) Special markings, protective panels and barriers must be placed in normally crowded spaces – bathroom and hallways to maintain the six (6) feet spacing of individuals;
- 19) Break and lunch periods must be spent inside the classroom, except to use the restroom;
- 20) Keep open, where feasible, all doors to classrooms, specialist rooms, labs and other areas accessible to students and staff.
- 21) Only two (2) students from any Grade/Form should be allowed to use the Restroom at the same time.
- 22) Where possible, students should be encouraged to bring their own snacks and lunches to school;
- 23) The Canteen Staff must prepare lunch, and have it delivered to classes based on the need;
- 24) Feeding Program food items and meals must be pre-packaged and delivered to students in the classroom;
- 25) Secondary Schools, where applicable, must coordinate a modified arrangement for the provision of lunches from outside vendors;
- 26) Avoid all non-essential, physical meetings, trainings and travel.
- 27) Where physical meetings are necessary, seek to have them in well ventilated areas with adequate physical distancing. Keep meetings to the shortest time possible to be effective.
- 28) Use alternatives to face to face meetings such as digital tools and digital means of communication.
- 29) There should be no gathering of more than four to five (4-5) persons within any School's Office space;

30) All outdoor spaces must be carefully utilized.

#### **Protocol IV – School Transportation (Buses)**

- 1) Parents are encouraged to use alternative modes of transportation for students where possible;
- 2) Where feasible, there shall be no more than twenty (20) students at any given time on the busses;
- 3) Students taking a bus to and from school must sit so as to maintain physical distance from each other (this could mean leaving an empty seat between students on each bus)
- 4) Seats should be clearly marked to indicate where students are to sit;
- 5) Assigned seating must be arranged. Where possible, seats should be assigned by cohorts (same students sit together each day);
- 6) All students riding on the bus must wear a mask or face covering;
- 7) All bus Drivers must maintain a minimum of 6 feet from students and wear a mask or face covering. A physical barrier of plexiglass can be considered for Drivers;
- 8) All windows on the bus must be open if weather allows.
- 9) All school buses will undergo cleaning and sanitization after each bus run, including but not limited to:
  - Handrails
  - Arm rests
  - Steering wheels
  - Doors
  - Seats

Service Providers must comply with cleaning protocols issued by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Transportation.

#### **Protocol V - Promoting Curriculum and Assessment Engagement**

- 1) To ensure completion of the Curriculum at each level, content delivery will be shared between face-face and online/virtual interaction;

- 2) All Teachers must proceed at a moderate pace in realigning and delivering the curriculum for lost learning time, as students will require additional time to regain their academic and vocational equilibrium.
- 3) Students with a disability or requiring learning support should expect to return to school to learn alongside their friends and see their teachers again, unless they have an underlying health condition, are sick, being contact traced or are isolated. Special Education Teachers must ensure that Special Needs students are adequately catered to by providing socio-emotional support and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that reflect missed content. Curricula and instructions must be modified to meet the needs of these students. For children who can't be in school it will be important to sustain online learning. Schools should continue to talk with children who remain at home and their parents and carers about:
  - How long this might go on for
  - Whether the children have the appropriate technology
  - How they might be supported until they return
  - How support staff might be able to work with the child, either in their home or remotely if possible
- 4) Assessment should include Project Based Learning -Portfolio and Project Assignments to complement Classwork and Tests.
- 5) All Schools are required to ensure adequate spacing for any given cohort of students for the writing of internal and external Examinations.

### **Protocol VI – Training**

- 1) The Department of Education and Schools will provide training sessions for Administration, Teachers, Students and Parents in small groups of five (5), Island based by Schools, or virtually where necessary and will be conducted to ensure that [social distancing](#) is maintained. The training will be provided on:
  - ✓ Understanding and Managing Covid-19;



- ✓ Managing Stress and Change;
- ✓ Student Behaviour, Cognitive Changes and Socio-Emotional Support;
- ✓ Supporting Marginalized Students – Literacy and Numeracy;
- ✓ Closing any gaps resulting from their time away from active schoolwork.
- ✓ ICT and online teaching and assessment
- ✓ Blended learning approaches
- ✓ Identified needs

### **Protocol VII - Socio-Emotional Support**

- 1) The COVID-19 pandemic will have had impacts on mental and well-being. Common reactions include (but are not restricted to):
  - Fear and anxiety – particularly in this context of returning to school
  - Anger and frustration, for example, over lost opportunities and changes of expectations
  - Confusion
  - Sadness – including grief related to bereavement (particularly those who have friends and families overseas)
  - Denial

The first priority must be all children’s well-being and settling back into school. It will therefore be important that schools work with children and their families to hear how the lockdown period has gone and to inform them of the support that will be offered to keep learning progressing.

- 2) Every school will have access to a suitably qualified mental health practitioner such as a Guidance Counsellor.
- 3) Mental health practitioners will work flexibly, based on the needs and priorities of their school and their students. Their roles will include:
  - Provision of direct counselling support to students and other early intervention services

- Coordination of support for students with complex needs
- 4) Contribution to whole-school approaches to health and well-being, include Life-Skills and HFLE classes

### **Staff**

1. Administrators should liaise with the Department of Social Development and the Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence or any other appropriate NGO to attend to the psychosocial needs of the staff prior to the introduction of students on the compound.

### **Students**

1. The Student Support Services within the Department of Education, in collaboration with Administration, must inform staff on methods of engaging with students after an extended period of absence from the physical classroom (reduced attention span, interaction, etc.).
2. Administrators must ensure that provision is made for Guidance Counsellors to interact with each class within the first two weeks of the school term. The emphasis will be on equipping students with the skills needed to orient to the new school environment. Guidance Counsellors, in collaboration with School Administrators, can partner with suitable NGO's and the Ministry of Health to administer sessions in the orientation programme.
3. Home Room periods must be time-tabled as a part of the orientation programme. Form/Class teachers will engage students in active discussions, lend support and give guidelines on adapting to the school environment. Form/Class teachers will be alert to any student who displays symptoms of any behaviour of concern and make necessary referrals to the Guidance Counsellors.
4. Deans (secondary school)/Senior Teachers (primary school) are to be rostered to interact with students of the respective year groups on a class by class basis to reinforce student expectations in keeping with the guidelines.

5. Support for a child's mental health must be provided through referrals to relevant agencies and trauma sensitive practices throughout the school

### **Parents**

1. Parents are encouraged to attend all parent sessions and PTA meetings to keep updated on school policy.
2. Parents must provide current contact information and email addresses.
3. Parents must respond to calls from the school or requests to collect their children/charges in a timely manner.
4. Parents must acquire and submit a certificate of medical clearance as needed.
5. Parents are to ensure that their child always has a clean mask in his/her possession and has a personal supply of sanitiser if possible. Parents must inform children of health protocols and guidelines from the Ministry of Health