



II. SCHOOL SAFETY AND HEALTH

As schools begin to reopen, the **primary concern remains the health and safety of learners, teachers and other school staff**. School leaders have a key role in maintaining a safe environment for teachers to work and students to learn. School leaders need to ensure staff cooperate with the measures to guard their own safety and that of students and other colleagues. School leaders can also perform an assessment of physical spaces to calculate upper limits of students per classroom where possible to ensure physical distancing norms are respected. School leaders can consider using all spaces including common areas such as libraries, corridors, and the outdoors, where and when appropriate.

Guiding questions for school leaders

Planning for a safe, physical learning environment

Have you considered:

- obtaining and reviewing guidelines from health and education authorities about ensuring your school is safe for reopening?
- organizing visits from public health experts and/or government authorities, where possible, to ensure your school is safe for re-opening?
- undertaking a risks assessment in consultation with staff, and developing a policy and plan to control risk at the school, taking into account the needs of different jobs at the school?
- mobilizing support from local health clinics or district health authorities, where possible, to provide assistance with back-to-school efforts?
- organizing inspections of the premises following the school closure period, including classrooms; water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities; and outdoor spaces?
- exploring possibilities for upgrading and improving school WASH facilities, if necessary, for example by constructing sex-segregated toilets and providing running water?
- exploring how to obtain sufficient and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), particularly masks, as well as soap, sanitizers, disinfectants, and disposable hand towels?

- coordinating with staff to develop a regular inspection, cleaning and disinfection plan for facilities and equipment, including disposal of potentially infectious waste and safe use of sanitizing products?

- drafting a plan with your staff for how to utilize all classrooms and other indoor and outdoor spaces (if appropriate) to ensure safe physical distancing between learners and teachers?

- preparing a plan to re-organize class time, if availability of space is an issue, so that there are smaller groups to allow for safe physical distancing? **(see also Section IV)**

- exploring strategies to limit contact between members of the school community, for example by using floor markings to direct foot-traffic flows, different entrances and exits, and staggered arrival and departure times, according to age cohorts?

Planning for behavioral policies to observe health and sanitation protocols and the use of PPE

Have you considered:

- with your teachers and other staff (including temporary staff and contractors) participating in training on the national sanitation and hygiene measures for risk prevention?

- promoting handwashing, use of hand sanitizer, respiratory hygiene and physical distancing?

- ensuring that your staff members have reviewed and understood your school's protocols and instructions related to their own safety and that of other colleagues and students?

- ensuring that all teachers and education support staff have access to suitable PPE, particularly masks, where adequate physical distancing cannot be ensured, including through facilitating and supporting mask-making where disposable masks are unavailable?

- discussing with your teachers and other staff how masks and other PPE are used to prevent the spread of COVID-19; and participating in training on when and how to use masks and other PPE, and how to maintain and dispose of them safely?

- undertaking a risk assessment for your staff to identify vulnerable staff members who may be more susceptible to infection (e.g. older teachers, teachers with prior health conditions, teachers with family members who have tested positive for COVID-19)?

- exploring extra measures that could be taken to ensure the safety of vulnerable staff members, including allowing them to work from home or take leave as appropriate?

- discussing with your teachers and other staff how to deal with and report situations that could present a risk to you, your colleagues and your students?

- working with relevant staff on plans for managing COVID-19, if school health services are available, including screening students and staff and isolating them should they present symptoms?

- reaching out to local authorities and the community for support, if no formal school health services are available, to manage potential COVID-19 cases in your school?

- sharing printed, online or verbal information about your school's hygiene and sanitation protocols and guidelines with teachers, other education personnel, and learners and their families?

- exploring possibilities for providing time during staff meetings and lessons for students and staff to discuss the school's ongoing COVID-19 response, any important updates on the disease, and good practices to follow when it comes to physical and mental health and well-being?

Tips

Help young children adapt. Use songs and play to help younger children adapt to regular handwashing and wearing masks. These songs are available online to help children understand the importance of handwashing and how long they have to wash their hands for (see these videos from Ubongo Kids in Tanzania <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGzvqkQbuWk> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlacO1h-KIQ>). For younger children, put masks on stuffed toys in the classroom. Older children can decorate masks or play games such as guessing facial expressions under masks.

Use WASH Kits. Save the Children has developed a series of three kits and a guidance note covering specific lists of items that should be included in COVID-19 WASH school kits as schools plan for safe reopening. For more information, see: [WASH School Kit 1](#); [WASH School Kit 2](#); [WASH School Kit 3](#); [School and Household Hygiene COVID-19 guidance](#).

Resources & further reading

- [A 10-step tool for a safe and healthy return to work in times of COVID-19](#), International Labour Organization, 2020
- [WASH@Work: a Self-Training Handbook](#), International Labour Organization, 2016
- [Reopening schools in the context of COVID-19: Health and safety guidelines from other countries](#), Learning Policy Institute, 2020
- [Safe Back to School: A Practitioner's Guide](#), Save the Children, 2020
- [Back to school: preparing and planning for the reopening of schools, UNESCO, 2020](#)
- [IASC Guidance on COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools](#), UNICEF, WHO & IFRC, 2020
- [WASH and Covid 19](#), World Health Organization, 2020
- [Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Standards for Schools in Low-cost Settings](#), World Health Organisation, 2009