



Joint UN Webinars on Safe Re-opening of Schools

UN organizations collaborating for the webinar: WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNFPA; WFP.

Purpose

Knowledge and experience sharing on safe school reopening and joint actions among health and education actors for operations and preparedness.

Rationale

Over last 18 months the COVID-19 pandemic has been associated with overwhelming challenges for countries' health, education and economic activities. The response to addressing the pandemic, including measures like strict lockdowns, puts many restrictions on social and economic activities, and has led to the prolonged closure of educational institutions at all levels. Such disruptions have had dire consequences on the learning, health and overall wellbeing of children and adolescents and has created multiple challenges for their parents, caregivers and teachers. Countries in South Asia have been highly affected, with children and adolescents having been away from school for more than a year in countries like Bangladesh, whilst all countries have experienced serious disruptions to learning despite attempts by government and others to reach them through remote learning. Remote learning has been variable in quality and reach, and many of the other benefits that schools offer such as school feeding; counselling, and access to health and protection services have also been seriously compromised by school closures.

With evolving knowledge on risk-benefit analysis and recognition of the potentially high risk of harm to the wellbeing of children and adolescents owing to prolonged school closure vis-a-vis the risk of the infection, the recommendation from UN agencies is to prioritize school reopening as soon as the local outbreak and transmission conditions allow the resumption of routine activities.

Since April 2021 it has also become apparent that there may be new waves of COVID infection and new variants with the possibility of continuous or repeated disruption to education and other services over the next year and beyond. Slow expansion in coverage of COVID-19 vaccination is an additional risk factor. The need to engage with several key actors, parents and caregivers and students themselves has also become increasingly apparent to address their concerns about safety in school setting. The government and stakeholders need to address adequate provisions for infection prevention and control and adherence to protocols to ensure a successful and sustainable return to school. It is also clear that authorities need to look at ways of delivering other school-based services such as school feeding and health even if schools need to be closed from time to time.

Fortunately, all countries are showing a commitment to safe school re-opening and are at different stages of planning and / or implementation. It is critical to follow public health and social measures and to practice recommended protocols for prevention and early detection of infection before and during the resumption of school operations. A range of partners has supported planning processes with government counterparts in the Ministries of Education and Health and have committed to continue the support going forward.

The proposed webinars build on an earlier set of webinars on safe school reopening organized by WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNFPA in October-November 2020 for the countries of South and South-East Asia Regions to share technical guidance and resources, and country-experiences among multiple stakeholders including officials from ministries of education and health. This collaboration has recently expanded, with the inclusion of additional partners with the establishment of a new network for School Health, Nutrition and Well-being under the Learning and Education 2030+ technical Working Group.

UN agencies in the Region in collaboration with partners propose a new set of webinars on safe school reopening with the following objectives:

- Discuss current situation, common challenges and share technical updates on latest guidance and recommendations to address these.
- Facilitate sharing of significant achievements and innovative experiences from selected countries in South Asia and South-East Asia for possible adaptation by other countries



- Identify key actions for the safe reopening of school and collaborative actions that can expedite these processes at the country and regional levels.

Target audience

- Programme Managers (Policy and Technical) from Ministries of Health and Education in member countries
- UN staff in health and education, as well as experts in child protection, WASH, nutrition and school feeding, and gender from regional and country levels
- Representatives from relevant partners agencies working in health and education and allied areas.

There will be two sessions. The first session is for information sharing to update the knowledge, which is detailed below. The second session will include experience sharing among countries and identifying key actions for preparedness and safe school reopening and operations.

Session 1: Joint UN Webinar on Safe School Reopening – The Latest Evidence and Guidance

Date and time: 02 September 2021, 11:00-13:00 (IST)

Registration: bit.ly/JoinUNWebinarSeries

Moderator: Francisco Benavides, UNICEF-EAPRO

1. **Welcome and objectives:** Neena Raina WHO-SEARO 05 Min
2. **Impact of school closures in South Asia and South East Asia:**
Jim Ackers, UNICEF-ROSA: 20 Min
Updates to enhance understanding of multiple adverse implications of prolonged school closure.
3. **Voices of stakeholders:** to understand their concerns: 15 Min

Interactions (Moderator): 15 Min

4. **Public health considerations in school re-opening:**
Rajesh Mehta, WHO: 20 Min
Highlight the current epidemiology; infection prevention and control strategies - risk and mitigation measures during school re-opening.
5. **Guidance on school reopening:**
Jenelle Babb, UNESCO: 20 Min
Share the recent and updated global guidelines, frameworks and operational tools and application in context of local situation and specificities

Interactions (Moderator): 15 Min

6. **Closing remarks:** Jo Sauvarin, UNFPA-APRO