



Safe Back to School: A Practitioner's Guide



Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented levels of disruption to education, impacting [over 90%](#) of the world's student population: 1.54 billion children, including 743 million girls. School closures and the wider socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on communities and society also disrupt children's and young people's normal support systems, leaving them more vulnerable to illnesses and [child protection risks](#) such as physical and humiliating punishment, sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage, child labour, child trafficking and recruitment and use in armed conflict. Girls and other marginalised groups, particularly those in displaced settings, are particularly affected.

As governments prepare to reopen schools and other learning sites, ministries and school communities must minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 within learning spaces and address the learning inequalities and protection concerns exacerbated by COVID-19 school closures, particularly for girls and other marginalised groups. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 school closures must inform disaster and emergency preparedness for future outbreaks of COVID-19 alongside other contextually specific hazards that might further jeopardize children's rights to learn, be safe and survive. The school reopening process offers a unique multi-sectoral opportunity for governments and school communities to build back better, address gender inequalities and strengthen the resilience of the education system. An inclusive, participatory process can help bring [all](#) children and young people into school and leave no one behind.

Standards & Resources

This document does not set any new standards but refers to the [INEE Minimum Standards](#), the [Child Protection Minimum Standards](#), the [Sphere Handbook](#), the [Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19](#) (WHO), and the [Guidance for the Prevention and Control of COVID-19 in schools](#) (IFRC, UNICEF, WHO).

This guide builds on the [UN Framework for Reopening Schools](#), giving concrete actions that can be taken at the community and school level to operationalize these global policy recommendations.

The [INEE](#) and [Global Education Cluster](#) websites host a wealth of additional COVID-19 related resources and tools.

Definitions in this guide

School: All formal and non-formal learning spaces for all ages, including, but not limited to, primary and secondary schools, temporary learning spaces, early childhood care, youth centres and development centers, child-friendly spaces and other facilities where learning activities occur.

Whole School Community: Children, caregivers, teachers, school management, community leaders and committees, and government.

Why a “Safe Back to School” guide?

This guide helps coordination and program teams plan an integrated, participatory process for safe school reopening.

Who can use this guide?

Program teams can use this guide to inform the planning and implementation of activities to support an integrated, participatory, safe return to school for the communities they support. The guide aims to be a user-friendly, practitioner-focused tool that outlines the key steps needed for a coordinated, inclusive, all-hazards approach to school reopening and links to further guidance where appropriate.

Coordination teams (such as Child Protection Area of Responsibility, Education Cluster, EiE Working Group Coordinators, Refugee Education Groups or Local Education Groups) are encouraged to share this document and reference this guidance as coordinated school reopening strategies are developed and operationalized. The implementation of the activities described in this guide contribute to achievement of key outputs and outcomes in the Global Education Cluster's COVID-19 Response & Recovery Framework (in [English](#) and [French](#)). The sectoral highlights in each phase emphasize the need to link between Education, WASH, Health, Nutrition, Child Protection and MHPSS coordination groups.

While the information in this guide can be used to advocate with governments, this guide is not intended to advise governments on policy and benchmarks for school reopening. The [UN Framework for Reopening Schools](#) can be a useful tool for ministerial engagement.

This guide is applicable in all contexts across the humanitarian-development nexus. **The actions described in the guide will need to be contextualized based on local practices and aligned with government standards.**

What is in the guide?

This guide is divided into two sections:

1. Checklists:

- [Integrated Safe Back-to-School Checklist for Program Staff](#): This 6-pager lists key actions for Health, Nutrition, WASH, Monitoring and Evaluation, Education and Child Protection sectors before and after schools reopen to ensure sectoral integration the school reopening process. The checklist is especially useful for project design and coordinated intersectoral planning (i.e. adaptations to the Humanitarian Response Plan) and for monitoring and oversight.
- [School-Friendly Safe Back-to-School Checklist](#): This 2-pager provides topline actions for a head teacher or school committee to follow.

2. Technical Annexes: 8 technical annexes are included which provide detailed guidance and resources for specific activities mentioned in the checklist. If an action in the checklist has a technical annex, this will be indicated by a magnifying glass icon.

- Annex 1 [Participatory, inclusive back-to-school campaigns](#)
- Annex 2 [Absence Management Systems](#)
- Annex 3 [Enable teachers in the transition back to school](#)
- Annex 4 [MHPSS for children as schools reopen](#)
- Annex 5 [Participatory education and protection continuity planning](#)
- Annex 6 [Aaptations for camp settings](#)
- Annex 7 [Additional Considerations for Early Learning Programmes](#) (New 07/07/20)
- Annex 8 [Advocacy messages](#)

Key Principles for Safe Back to School

An integrated approach: COVID-19 has a multi-faceted impact on children's rights, impacting education, protection, MHPSS, health, nutrition, and more. As schools prepare for reopening, a coordinated and integrated approach is critical to addressing children's holistic needs.

Child & youth participation: Children have a right to be heard in processes that impact them and should be considered full-fledged actors in decision-making. Child participation should be inclusive and accessible for all children. Young people can play a key role in community mobilisation and in dissemination of accurate information.

Gender, inclusion and accessibility: Children may face barriers or have different needs in returning to school because of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, refugee/asylum-seeker status, socio-economic status, or other factors. All efforts during school reopening must be inclusive and accessible for all children. This is a unique opportunity to bring all children into school, both returning students and children previously out of school.

Whole school community: Engage the whole school community – including children, caregivers, teachers, school administration, community and local government – in an inclusive and accessible way at all stages of the school re-opening process.

Build on existing structures: School communities should capitalize on their many existing capacities during the school reopening process. These may be existing children's clubs, student councils, PTAs, youth-led groups, child protection committees or family networks.

Build back resilient: The school reopening process provides an opportunity to strengthen existing education, health, protection and disaster preparedness systems, making them more accessible, inclusive, participatory and protective. By applying lessons learned from COVID-19, governments and whole school communities can better prepare themselves and reduce risks of future crises related to health, natural, and everyday hazards, violence and conflict.

Safe Back-to-School Checklist

Before Schools Reopen

MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY & LEARNING

- Engage the whole school community, including children and young people, in back-to-school planning and campaigns using participatory methods**
 - Assess the readiness of schools to reopen. Assess the availability of teachers, cleaning staff, WASH facilities and supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE) and (alternative) space to ensure physical distancing, as per national guidelines if available.
 - Discuss with children and young people how they feel about school reopening, both positive and negative aspects. Feedback on how their opinions and recommendations have been considered (see [Technical Annex 4](#)).
- Consult with teachers and other education personnel and caregivers about their concerns and ideas for safe school reopening. Feedback on how their opinions and recommendations have been considered.
- Use this Checklist to develop a [participatory Safe Back to School monitoring tool](#) to track progress with the whole school community. This can also be used to aggregate progress on reopening at district or national levels.
- See Global Education Cluster's COVID-19 Response & Recovery Framework (in [English](#) and [French](#)) and [supplement](#) for reference.

HEALTH, NUTRITION, & WASH

- Clean and disinfect school facilities with emphasis on surfaces that are touched by many people**
 - All schools should be cleaned and disinfected. Schools that have been used as treatment/isolation centers or other types of temporary facilities should receive a more thorough disinfection process advised by local health officials.
 - Procure adequate WASH resources from this list (in [English](#) or [French](#)) and follow these School Hygiene COVID-19 Cleaning Instructions (in [English](#) or [French](#)).
 - Allocate funding for replenishment of consumables such as soap and disinfectant.
 - Procure personal protective equipment (PPE) in sufficient amounts to adhere to national standards and train anyone required to wear it on correct use and disposal.
 - Ensure the cleaning and disinfection of features reserved for people with disabilities, including handrails/ramps, accessibility doorknobs, etc.
- Engage whole school community in cleaning and maintenance for school reopening**
 - Together with school staff and existing school and community committees (i.e., school management committees, WASH committees, youth led groups), develop a [plan](#) with budget, roles and responsibilities for promoting and ensuring cleanliness and regular disinfection. The plan should mobilize community resources. Consider [cash or voucher assistance](#) to support sourcing of materials. Consider including this plan in any existing School Improvement Plan.
 - Train school staff, caregivers, young people and other male and female community members who will be involved in cleaning, disinfection

Use this checklist to be gender transformative!

Consult with girls and boys, women and men to address gender inequalities in school reopening

Ensure services and referral pathways consider the specific risks faced by girls and other vulnerable groups

Use appropriate communication formats to reach girls, women and other vulnerable groups who often have less access to information channels

and maintenance on safe procedures for these activities; refer to these School Hygiene COVID-19 Cleaning Instructions (in [English](#) or [French](#)) if government guidance has not been developed. Deliver training in languages that participants understand using [consistent terminology](#).

- Establish and monitor daily, weekly, and monthly cleaning [schedules](#) and outline responsible persons, with cleaning responsibilities equitably distributed between men and women.
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) in line with national recommendations, with cleaning and maintenance staff and volunteers prioritized. As cleaning staff are often women, this is an important gender consideration.
- **Ensure availability of safe water, toilets and adequate, accessible hand washing stations**
 - Increase [handwashing facilities/stations](#) to adhere to national standards on learners:handwashing stations ratio. Use age-appropriate, low-cost, low maintenance, and eco-friendly [designs](#) which are also accessible to children with disabilities (e.g. universal design). Conduct repairs as needed, taking [child safeguarding](#) precautions.
 - Secure contextually appropriate WASH kits in line with government standards. If national standards are unavailable, consult this standard hygiene list (in [English](#) or [French](#)) and its COVID-19 supplementary list (in [English](#) and [French](#)).
 - Remember that menstrual hygiene materials are essential components of WASH kits. Access to materials, non-infectious disposal, clean (and lockable from the inside) sex-segregated toilets/latrines & handwashing stations accessible for girls, boys and children with disabilities, and information are necessary to ensure a safe return to school for girls and female staff. See [pages 21-30](#) for key MHM actions. Facilities should include the discrete disposal or laundering of hygiene/ menstrual hygiene products. 1 toilet for 30 girls, 1 toilet for 60 boys ([Sphere](#), page 113 & 146).
 - Train teachers, educational and cleaning staff on school hygiene practices and disinfection.
- **Prepare age-friendly, inclusive Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) messages**
 - Translate into local languages, adapt and print age-appropriate and accessible (including large print and illustrated versions) handwashing, good personal hygiene, and school safety [messages](#), so they are ready to distribute when schools reopen. Ensure information materials address rumors/fears or stigmatization that could adversely affect specific groups of children/

community members. Distribute through all available communication channels in languages inclusive of minority communities.

□ **Prepare for safe food preparation and services**


- Where school meals or snacks were provided before schools closed, plan to restart provision as soon as possible. Due to COVID-19 many families need regular access to healthy meals as a matter of urgency. Where on-site distribution is not feasible, consider providing or increasing take-home rations.
- Procure nutrient-enhanced school feeding supplies if nutritional status of children and young people has significantly dropped.
- Plan to reopen school canteens to keep children and young people and staff safe: i.e. reduced capacity, protection measures for staff (see [WFP/FAO/UNICEF guidance](#), pages 7-8), staggered lunch hours, and hand washing before and after.
- Ensure that school canteens have safe water supply for drinking and hygiene, drinking water stations, handwashing facilities/stations with soap nearby, and proper waste disposal measures (e.g. trash bins, proper drainage).

□ **Prepare for essential school health services and referral protocols**




- Ensure schools are properly equipped and comply with government school health facility standards.
- Stock schools with first aid kits, including personal protective equipment (PPE) thermometers and rubbing alcohol for cleaning thermometers.
- Orient school personnel on protocols related to COVID-19 infection prevention and control and are trained to implement them safely and discreetly. Ensure teachers, school management, and children and young people are aware of the health services available and referral protocols. Ensure all such awareness materials are age appropriate and available in languages that children and young people speak at home.
- Establish proper recording and reporting of COVID-9 cases and other health information management, as recommended by governments.
- Connect schools with local health facilities for quick, accessible referrals.
- Identify temporary isolation areas for children/ school staff who may be infected to safely wait before receiving care.

EDUCATION


□ Prepare school for physical distancing in, around, and on the way to schools

- Consider staggered schedules within the school day (start/end times, recess, lunch break etc.) for different groups of children and young people and the use of several entrances, to avoid overcrowding on the way to school, at the school entrance, and in the school itself.
- To the extent possible, ensure the implementation of reduced or amended class sizes, allowing physical distancing as per national standards, or [3 feet or 1 meter](#) if government guidance has not been developed. Consider dividing classes into shifts, amending seating arrangements for children and young people, establishing temporary learning spaces, or collaborating with community leaders to identify alternative learning spaces in the community together. If class/contact time is reduced due to these actions, prepare blended learning possibilities combining physical class time with distance learning activities. For adaption to camp settings, see [Technical Annex 6](#). 
- Provide additional school supplies such as pencils and notebooks so that students do not need to share equipment.
- Activities that include physical contact, such as contact and team sports, should be substituted by other activities that allow for safe physical distancing (i.e. running, open-air aerobics).
- Inform all school personnel and students of physical distancing measures. Increase staff at schools as needed (including volunteers to support physical distancing and hygiene practices). Physical distancing between adults is as important as students.
- Promote the development of inclusive, age-appropriate messages about social/physical distancing in school and on students' journeys to and from school. Include messaging for caregivers who drop-off/pick-up children at school.

□ Take action to ensure all children and young people return to school, prioritizing the most vulnerable

- If students will gradually phased back to school, prioritize students who are (1) vulnerable (2) have reduced access to distance learning modalities and/or (3) in examination classes.
 - Support Ministry of Education-led back-to-school initiatives with participatory back-to-school campaigns that engage children, young people, caregivers, and education personnel. Messages must target the most vulnerable, including girls and children with disabilities, tackle stigmatization, and be accessible and inclusive (see [Technical Annex 1](#)). 
 - Prepare an absence management system to monitor student & teacher attendance (see [Technical Annex 2](#)). 
 - Establish/strengthen the linkage between schools and community social protection systems for quick referral of the most vulnerable students and their families.
 - Identify the most vulnerable and their needs in order to provide additional support for all children and young people to safely return to school. Consider [cash or voucher assistance to vulnerable households](#) to support children's and young people's return to school (see 3-pager in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#)).
 - Distribute back-to-school kits as per national standards. Ensure distribution points are physically accessible for persons with disabilities, share information about the distribution in various formats (i.e., illustrations, multilingual announcements). Deliver back-to-school kits to individuals who cannot access the distribution point.
 - **Support school personnel well-being and train teachers on key topics and pedagogy to ensure a safe, quality return to school** (see [Technical Annex 3](#)) 
-

CHILD PROTECTION & MHPSS

- **Prepare teachers and education personnel to meet the psychosocial and protection needs of children and young people and to manage their own health and wellbeing (see [Technical Annex 3](#))** 
- **Update/establish effective referral mechanisms**
 - Update school-based reporting and referral mechanisms for protection and health concerns, ensuring they are gender-sensitive, inclusive and age-appropriate adapted for COVID context if necessary. Test communication channels.
 - Establish procedures to follow in case of suspected infection, including guidance for school staff to discreetly deal with children and young people/teachers who show symptoms without creating harm for the individual.
 - Identify mother-tongue based communication channels to inform families with members in high-risk groups (i.e., elderly, persons with chronic disease) if they may be impacted by an infection case at school. Protect privacy of persons suspected to be infected and to use factual language to avoid stigmatization.
- **Organize with child protection case workers and/or social workers to support school reopening**
 - **Coordinate** between education and child protection staff to conduct house visits where possible.
 - Prepare child protection case workers/social workers to receive increased reports at time of reopening. If possible, arrange for child protection case workers/social workers to be present at schools during reopening.

SAFEGUARDING

A commitment to safeguarding children, young people and adults from any form of abuse and exploitation from staff, volunteers and partners should remain paramount as schools reopen and supporting projects resume. Ensure child safeguarding policies refer to and reflect gender, and that child safeguarding focal points at schools are accessible to girls and other marginalised groups. Refresher sessions to reinforce the importance of safeguarding (and any changes to local referral services) at this time are essential.

1. Cash transfer and the delivery of goods to support marginalized populations should include clear guidance and risk assessment to avoid exploitation and inappropriate power dynamics in the identification of the most vulnerable persons and the delivery of any form of relief aid.
2. Continue to embed child safeguarding processes and key messages into all activities where there is direct contact with children and young people - and support them to keep themselves safe from abuse and ensure they know where to report any concerns they may have.
3. Support schools to:
 - Refresh their own safeguarding processes and key messages included in their School Child Safeguarding/Protection Policies with their teaching and non-teaching staff, with their students, School Management Committees (or PTAs) to re-enforce expected behaviours and their school reporting and response mechanisms, particularly when schools re-open and staff, students and parents begin to return to school.
 - Refresh and/or designate School Child Safeguarding Focal Points.
 - Display their School Code of Conduct (including a child-friendly version) outside as well as inside the school buildings so that they are still visible when schools are closed.

After Schools Reopen

MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY & LEARNING

□ Conduct needs and gender assessment using participatory methods

- Conduct a rapid needs assessment on the education, CP/MHPSS, [WASH, and H&N needs](#) now that schools have reopened. Assess how much children and young people continued learning during school closures and what support is needed to return to school.
- Conduct an analysis to identify the specific needs, interests, capacities and vulnerabilities of children and young people across various categories, such as sex, age, ethnicity, religion, castes, language, disability, socio-economic status, legal status, among others. Use child participatory methods.

□ Refresh or establish accessible, gender and age-friendly accountability and feedback mechanisms

- Collect feedback from children and young people, caregivers and teachers on their experiences of school closures and the support they received for learning and wellbeing. Use feedback to inform planning for future disruptions to education.
- Provide accountability and feedback mechanisms for the whole school community. Options must be available for persons with disabilities, limited literacy, and for speakers of minority languages. For example (re)establish parent-teacher committees, school student council, youth clubs school clubs focused on school safety, anonymous feedback boxes and a transparent process for opening them and acting on the feedback.

HEALTH, NUTRITION, & WASH

□ Ensure that cleaning and disinfection measures are effective and regular

- Plan for routine cleaning and disinfection of school facilities and surroundings especially frequently touched surfaces such as tables, doors/door handle, etc. See School Hygiene COVID-19 Cleaning Instructions (in [English](#) or [French](#)).
- Carry out the routine maintenance of WASH facilities. All functional toilets should be open for use and maintained.
- Ensure safe water and soap is available at accessible, age-appropriate and gender-sensitive hand washing stations.
- Clean and disinfect water tanks regularly.
- Encourage equal sharing of water sourcing and cleaning tasks between women and men.

□ Educate children and young people about good hygiene, health, nutrition and menstrual hygiene

- Ensure hygiene practices, including physical distancing and alternatives to sharing materials with others, are in place and integrated into classroom activities.
- Share inclusive, accessible, age-appropriate [messages](#) on handwashing and safe sneezing/coughing into your elbow in schools regularly and through various formats (i.e. posters, daily announcements).

- Support safe peer-to-peer and child/ youth-led learning, education and risk communication activities.

- Build on existing sexual and reproductive health rights education initiatives to address SGBV increases during COVID-19.

□ Increase air flow and ventilation

- Open windows or use air conditioning when possible.
- Consider open-air schooling where feasible.

□ Ensure the safety of school canteens

- Ensure regular cleaning and disinfection for canteen facilities and utensils.
- Consider staggered lunches to ensure physical distancing.
- Procure additional bowls and utensils to prevent sharing or ask children and young people to bring their own from home. Regularly remind children not to share the same cup or utensils for eating or drinking.
- Ensure food vendors and canteen staff to wash hands with soap and clean water before entering school, before preparing food, and when leaving, in addition to standard handwashing practices (i.e., after using the toilet). Encourage male shared responsibility for school feeding so women are not inequitably burdened.
- Canteens staff should use gloves and dispose



of them in a closed waste bin when exposed to possible contaminants (i.e., raw materials, touching the face or body parts, touching money, touching shared surfaces).

- ❑ Set-up of referral mechanisms between schools and health centers if suspected cases of malnutrition arise.
- ❑ Create contingency plans for the distribution of meals/food baskets in preparation for potential rapid closure of schools (see [WFP/FAO/UNICEF guidance](#), pages 2-6).
- ❑ **Monitor absences and implement measures to manage or prevent health risks**
 - ❑ Ensure all students, caregivers and staff understand that they should “stay at home if unwell” do not require doctor notes.
 - ❑ Use school daily attendance data (student and teacher attendance) to compare with attendance rates before school closures. Identify gaps, for entire schools, for classes, by gender and other dimensions of discrimination, such as disability, location (e.g., rural/urban) or language group/ethnicity.
- ❑ Use existing referral mechanism and/or community social protection systems to respond to needs of students and groups of students at high risk of chronic absenteeism and dropout. Ensure teachers in high-risk categories are also monitored and supported and that their rights and entitlements are protected.
- ❑ Use daily absence monitoring (with tools such as [Waliku](#)) to identify health risks and implement school wide prevention, or individual response activities (see [Technical Annex 2](#)).
- ❑ If a higher than usual absence amongst students and teachers is noticed, inform health authorities immediately.
- ❑ **Prepare for future school closures due to further virus outbreaks:**
 - ❑ Sanitize the school before it is closed.
 - ❑ Identify most vulnerable children and young people not included in school feeding programme.
 - ❑ Preposition WASH supplies for households.

EDUCATION

- ❑ **Prioritize psychosocial support and socio-emotional learning activities in the reopening period**
 - ❑ Where possible, consider a transition period of two or more days which focuses on reestablishing routines and sharing experiences before starting academic tasks.
 - ❑ Include basic MHPSS or SEL activities into daily classroom routine (see [Technical Annex 5](#)).
 - ❑ Encourage caregivers, children and young people to support wellbeing with simple exercises (see [Technical Annex 4](#)).
- ❑ **Identify additional learning needs (see [Technical Annex 3](#))**
 - ❑ Support teachers to conduct formative assessments of children’s learning inform teaching practices and need for additional support
 - ❑ According to students needs and national strategies, support students who have missed out on distance learning or fallen behind during school closures (i.e. remedial or catch-up classes, after-school study classes, and/or learning during summer/winter breaks). Teacher committees can agree on support strategies.
- ❑ **Prepare for recurring or future school closures**
 - ❑ Conduct an inclusive, participatory review to update or develop a school’s educational continuity plan based on learnings from COVID-19. Consider potential for re-closure and reopening due to a new COVID-19 wave or other hazards found in your context (see [Technical Annex 5](#)).
 - ❑ Share lessons and best practices for educational continuity with the Ministry of Education and advocate for the development of [crisis-sensitive education sector plans](#) and multi-hazard preparedness plans.
 - ❑ Advocate for increased investment in distance learning to prepare for future school closures, including low tech options.
 - ❑ Preposition supplies to support learning at home.
 - ❑ Activate/ reactivate teacher support networks. Consider options to use cash to support teachers during future closures, particularly where home-based learning results in additional expenditures for teachers.

CHILD PROTECTION & MHPSS

- **Ensure psychosocial support for children and young people, prioritizing girls and other vulnerable groups (see [Technical Annex 4](#))** 
 - Deliver age-appropriate, gender-sensitive, inclusive, accessible messages on psychosocial wellbeing and stress prevention.
 - Engage children and young people in seeking solutions and developing peer-to-peer support and awareness activities.
 - Work with schools to ensure that health and protection messages are conveyed to children, young people and caregivers in a way that reassures rather than distresses.
 - Check which local community-based child protection committees are functional to address child protection issues and make necessary referrals.
 - Identify children and young people in high distress and/or with mental health conditions and refer them to specialized services. Coordination of MHPSS activities and referrals across sectors, including Education, CP and Health, is coordinated by MHPSS Technical Working Groups (where they exist) at country level).
 - Establish/revitalize the school-based child protection committee in charge of coordinating with the school administration to regularly identify and refer children and young people in need of MHPSS services for direct support and/or referral.
- **Support teachers & other education personnel on own well-being & stress management (see [Technical Annex 3](#))** 
 - Establish/strengthen teacher support methods such as peer-to-peer support groups and coaching sessions to support and value teachers.
 - Promote regular activities to support teachers' wellbeing.
 - Provide referrals to MHPSS or other specialized services for teachers as needed.
- **Share continuous, clear information on COVID-19 with the whole school community**
 - Promote child and youth participation in the development and dissemination of key health and wellbeing messages, including to debunk stigmatization
 - Involve parent-teacher associations, young people and school management committees in delivering these messages to the whole school community.
 - Agree and use non-stigmatizing easily understood terminology in all information on COVID-19. [This multilingual COVID-19 Glossary may be useful.](#)
- **Prepare for future school closures due to further virus outbreaks:**
 - Identify vulnerable children and young people that are at risk of dropping out or that would require close support and follow-up from child protection or other specialized services.
 - Share information with children and young people, caregivers and teachers about reporting and referral procedures for protection cases while schools are closed (i.e., hotlines, contacts for community child protection committee)

Public Awareness Messages & Coordination

The sharing of key public health and MHPSS messages has been central to the global COVID-19 response. With harmonized messages, there is a greater likelihood that all government and civil society actors will use and follow these messages. If everyone is using the same messages, children and communities will hear the same information from multiple sources and will more likely understand and act upon these messages.

Clusters or other coordinating groups can play a key role:

- Work with key ministries and other humanitarian coordination groups to identify or agree accurate public awareness messages and share these widely

at the school level. Consider this [8-page guidance on pandemic messages](#) if no national guidelines available. For messages related to other natural or every hazards, violence or conflict, consult the relevant chapters in this all-hazards guidance on public awareness messages (in [English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Arabic](#), and [Russian](#)).

- Establish communication lines with national or subnational education and health authorities, to receive up-to-date information on national guidelines and to acquire authorization to reopen if needed.
- Consult with children to ensure messages are child-friendly. Where possible, support children's participation in defining the messages.

School-Friendly Safe Back-to-School Checklist

A tool for school management to plan the safe reopening of the school

STEPS TO TAKE BEFORE REOPENING

- Contact local, subnational, or national authorities to receive guidance on:
 - School reopening protocols and support available (i.e., hygiene materials and PPE)
 - Support available for attracting additional teachers in case teachers do not return or more are needed to follow physical distancing rules
 - Changes to assessments or curriculum as a result of COVID-19
 - Plans to support learners who have fallen behind when school was closed (i.e., remedial classes, catch-up classes, accelerated learning classes, reading clubs, social-emotional learning)
- Receive authorization of Ministry of Education to reopen school.
- Clean/disinfect entire school. Use extra care if school was used as a quarantine facility, health center or for other purposes during school closure.
- Have necessary water and sanitation infrastructure available (gender-separated toilets/handwashing stations).
- Have enough hygiene and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplies available: hygiene kits, cleaning materials, disinfectants, soap, hand sanitizer, paper towels, masks, gloves, etc.
- Develop daily/weekly cleaning schedule for the entire school premises.
- Train staff on cleaning the school premises as per established schedule.
- Train teachers and school management on good hygiene practices, psychosocial support and COVID-19.
- Rearrange classrooms, canteen and school to allow for physical distancing during all activities.
- Revise school schedule to allow for physical distancing. Consider using different entrances and staggering start/finish times, lunch breaks, and recess.
- Ensure transportation to and from school (if pre-existing) meets physical distancing requirements.
- Share-appropriate information on COVID-19 and good hygiene practices in different formats in classrooms, hallways, and canteens so that children and young people with and without disabilities can understand (i.e., posters, songs)
- Make signs with age-friendly illustrations to show children and young people how to enter/exit school and move within the school according to physical distancing rules.
- Agree on a distance learning program if students will access schools only in turns/shifts.
- Establish protocols for safe food preparation and service. Include handwashing, staggering lunch shifts, sanitizing canteen, training for food handling, and sanitizing cookware, plates, utensils, and cups.
- Establish protocol for teachers and school management when they identify a student or colleague who displays symptoms of COVID-19 (i.e. temporary isolation locations in school, referral to health services).
- Establish a system to monitor absenteeism and drop-out, disaggregated by gender, age and vulnerability criteria to flag and analyse an increase in both absenteeism and drop-out figures.
- Check that child protection referrals procedures are in place to report concerns and refer children to services.
- Set up psychosocial support activities for children and young people, caregivers and teachers as needed.
- Prepare and distribute distance learning materials for all age groups and children with disabilities, for possible future closures.

WHOLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, CAREGIVERS, TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY

- Contact Parent Teacher Association, School Management Committee, or other school committee and coordinate the back-to-school campaign. Invite children and young people and help their opinions to be heard.
- Inform all caregivers and children and young people on school opening date, time and procedures, including drop-off and pick-up.
- Share facts about COVID-19 with children and young people, caregivers, teachers and community to fight stigmatization.
- To prepare for school reopening, ask all caregivers, children and young people:
 - Will you return when school reopens?
 - Do you face any challenges that would prevent you from returning to school?
 - Can you continue distance learning from home? For how long?
 - What extra support would you need to return to school?
- To prepare for possible future school closures, ask teachers, parents and children and young people:
 - What worked well with distance learning?
 - What can we do better?
- Engage community to prepare the school for reopening, such as:
 - Cleaning school premises and rearranging classrooms
 - Prepare alternative/external spaces as classrooms to follow physical distancing rules

TEACHERS

- Contact all teachers to determine whether they can return to teaching in the school
- Organize meeting with all teachers, school management and other school staff to train on reopening protocols.
- Establish a system to monitor teacher well-being once school reopens, including the use of peer-to-peer support/teachers circles.
- Establish a system to monitor teachers' health and support their access health services if needed.
- Continue Teacher Professional Development on topics such as:
 - Provision of remedial education, catch-up classes, accelerated learning
 - Distance and remote teaching
 - Psychosocial support and social-emotional learning

Technical Annex 1 - Participatory, inclusive back-to-school-campaigns

WHY do we need a participatory, inclusive back-to-school campaign?

Before COVID-19, a historic 9 out of 10 children attended school globally. As schools reopen after COVID-19, strong nationally led back-to-school campaigns are needed to ensure that this progress made on universal access to education is not lost. Our goal is that no child or young person is left behind and that **all** children and young people return to school, prioritizing girls, refugee and displaced children and youth, children and young people living in conflict, children and young people with disabilities and other marginalized groups of children and young people at risk of drop-out. Special attention should be paid to ensuring that children and young people do not drop out due to discrimination because of lack of space and challenges of applying physical distancing.

WHAT are the key messages?

The key messages in the back-to-school campaign must be child-friendly, age-appropriate, accessible to and inclusive of persons with disabilities and available in the relevant local languages. Remember to share messages through different modalities to help reach **all** audiences (i.e. loudspeaker/radio/TV for those with hearing difficulties, posters with images and simple text for those less literate). If there is a national back-to-school campaign, use the following messages and link to the national campaign plans where possible.

- **Facts about school reopening:** Reopening date; any steps that caregivers/children and young people must take to prepare for reopening.
- **Steps school is taking to be a safe space:** Disinfection; physical distancing rules; procedures for health checks; etc.
- **Facts about COVID-19:** How COVID-19 spreads; how to protect yourself from COVID-19.
- **Debunk stigmatization:** Address stereotypes or superstitions about persons who have been infected by COVID-19 or who are assumed to have been infected (i.e. health workers, family members of those infected, certain ethnicities).
- All children and young people, including most marginalized, should be able to return:
 - Target messages to encourage girls, refugee and displaced children and youth, children and young people with disabilities, and other marginalized groups to attend.
 - Deliver accessible messages in various languages and formats (radio/loudspeaker, handouts, illustrations, etc.).
 - Include information resources are available to support children's and young people's return to school (i.e. CASH, support services, school feeding, additional training teachers have received). Highlight any changes

that have been made to the school environment to make it more welcoming, supportive of marginalized children and young people.

- Provide information on how to refer child protection concerns.

WHO should be involved?

A successful campaign will be led by the national and subnational authorities, affected communities, including children and young people and local duty bearers as this promotes **local ownership** of the back-to-school agenda. Community actors know their context best and can tailor messaging to be culturally appropriate; identify the most popular information points (i.e. markets, religious centers), the most accessible languages and media channels (i.e. radio, newspapers, Whatsapp) for sharing back-to-school messaging; and identify which children and young people in their community are most at risk of not returning to school and find community-based solutions to support their return. Use a **whole school** approach by inviting participants from across the socio-ecological model (i.e., children and young people, caregivers, teachers/school administration, community leaders and local duty bearers). Encourage **inclusion** by inviting local committees or civil society organizations who specialize in disability rights, girls' education, etc.

HOW can children and young people participate in a safe, meaningful way?

Children and young people can play an important role in their local back-to-school campaign. They understand the issues that are most affecting them, which can help in targeting messaging and modality (e.g. social media, community theater, song, peer-to-peer advocacy at sports practice/play dates). Children and young people can also help identify classmates or others who have not returned to school. Remember to adhere to the 9 principles of child participation (in [English](#) & [Spanish](#)).

Children as "back-to-school" agents of change!

In Indonesia after the Central Sulawesi earthquake, Save the Children organized children's performances (i.e., parade, drama) to reassure that the situation was now safe for children to return to school. These performances highlighted what steps had been taken to rehabilitate the school and what MHPSS support would be available. Child performances also highlighted the main issues impacting student attendance and wellbeing. This contributed to the advocacy targeting duty bearers to invest in Safe Schools programming.

Technical Annex 2 - Absence Management Systems

Epidemics that lead to school closures create new barriers to accessing education that make [children's return to school more difficult](#). This is especially true for marginalized children and young people such as children and young people with disabilities, girls and children and young people in conflict or crisis contexts. As schools reopen or start a new academic year, it is vital schools have the necessary tools to monitor students' return. Tracking students' attendance and absence in order to better inform programmatic decisions, notably around child protection and health, will help to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 school closures.

Information on re-enrollment will be available through national Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), though it may take some time for this national

system to be updated. Local coordination mechanisms and/or local government bodies may need support in managing and analyzing student enrollment and attendance data – capturing those who have not re-enrolled and those whose absence is shown on attendance records, on a daily or weekly basis to ensure all children and young people, particularly the most marginalized, receive the support needed to return to and stay in school. Having this information at the local level can more readily support program decision making, interagency coordination and community engagement.

This chart outlines 2 programming options:

Programming Option & Contact	Resource Requirements	Frequency of Data Collection	Description
Waliku	Smart phone for teachers Access to data/airtime	Daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers record attendance daily and follow up with children absent for more than 3 consecutive days through a task-list every day/week Disaggregation by gender, disability and/or other criteria as defined locally Individual students can be tracked System records causes of absenteeism, which can be integrated with health and protection monitoring and response teams School principals meet with teachers weekly/monthly to review absenteeism on dashboards and respond with school-wide education, health, protection messages/activities/policies
UNICEF - Edu-Trac, which uses Rapid Pro or TextIt SMS technology	SMS phone for only head teacher and/or all teachers or community education committees	Weekly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A series of SMS are sent to head teachers or community education committees requesting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly gross attendance of boys/girls (disaggregated) Weekly gross attendance of children with disabilities (or other disaggregation as defined) Weekly gross attendance of male/female teachers (disaggregated) Weekly cumulative attendance of teachers School head teacher or community education committees will receive an SMS from system, in real time, sharing a brief analysis of the information shared Individual students can NOT be tracked, this system provides overarching school attendance/absence trends to inform school-wide education, health, protection messages/activities/policies
		Monthly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A series of SMS are sent to head Teacher requesting # of functional WASH facilities to aggregate WASH needs in a select area (or other disaggregation as defined)

Technical Annex 3 - Enable teachers in the transition back to school

When planning for the return to school, special attention must be paid to teachers who play a key role in supporting the wellbeing and development of their learners. Teachers must be prepared to support the social and emotional learning of their students, provide them with the necessary [psychological first aid](#) and implement the necessary measures for a safe return to school (e.g., physical distancing, hygiene measures). Moreover, teachers' own wellbeing cannot be neglected. COVID-19 has impacted teachers, their families and their communities in multiple ways and many experience increased stress as a result of school closures and reopening. Work to reopen schools should be done in partnership with teachers and teacher unions, building on trust in the professionalism and pedagogical practice of teachers and other education personnel. See the Teacher Task Force Call to Action [here](#).

What Can Be Done To Support Teachers?

Teachers need to be supported and receive adequate information on how they can contribute to a safe return to school for themselves and all learners. An investment in teacher wellbeing during the reopening phase will result in long-term benefits, as teachers can act as community 'thought leaders', ensuring safety, health and education continuity.

Ideas for supporting teacher wellbeing include:

- **Teachers peer networks** that allow teachers to share their experiences, develop solutions collectively and strengthen their motivation and wellbeing.
- **Support from school leaders and education officials** who play a critical role in ensuring teachers are connected and supported. These officials can refer teachers to necessary resources and provide basic psychosocial support by listening to their concerns and encouraging/praising them.
- **Communication mechanisms** that are familiar (such as SMS, Whatsapp etc) to ensure that teachers receive clear, continuous information about the status of COVID-19 and school and national action plans to respond to the virus.
- **MHPSS for teachers** such as [training](#) on wellbeing and stress management.
- **Compliance with government guidelines on health and welfare of essential workers**, including teachers and other education personnel. Where teachers are at particular risk or contract COVID-19, they should be supported to remain at home until fully recovered and able to safely return to school.
- **Specific support for female teachers** such as child-care or transportation may be needed.

What Do Teachers Need To Know?

To support the back-to-school process and ensure its safety and effectiveness, teachers' capacities and knowledge should be strengthened around:

- **COVID-19 and its implications for children, young people and teachers:** This [TPD guidance](#) provides say-do activities for small groups of teachers (max 10) related to COVID-19. This [self-study booklet](#) can accompany the TPD module or be used as a standalone tool. It is important that teachers are familiar with COVID-19 so that they can understand the rumors and misinformation and stigma that exist in the community and how this can have a negative impact on certain groups of children and young people.
- **COVID-19 prevention with specific hygiene, hand washing and physical distancing measures:** Teachers have a key role to play in the dissemination and respect of these practices. They must master and model them to help children and young people stay safe.
- **Social exclusion linked to COVID-19 stigmatization, including [how to prevent and respond to stigmatization](#).**
- **Social & Emotional Learning and MHPSS:** These [Children's Activities](#) can be adapted for COVID-19. If SEL can be integrated into the curriculum, see the World Bank's age-appropriate [SEL curricula](#). See [Technical Annex 4](#) for specific MHPSS activities for children.
- **Identifying & Reporting Protection Concerns:** As schools reopen, teachers should be prepared to identify child protection risks and referral pathways, including SGBV given the unique needs of girls after COVID-19. This [TPD guidance](#) and [slide deck](#) on the three principles of psychological first aid tailored to teachers:
 - **Look:** Identify children and young people showing signs of distress
 - **Listen:** Communicate sensitively with a child or young person in distress
 - **Link:** Refer a child or young person to support services they may need

How Should Teaching And Pedagogy Change?

Returning to teaching in the classroom might feel challenging in the context of COVID-19 and weeks of interrupted schooling. There are also opportunities to improve teaching and learning practices:



Plan:

- Start by planning activities and lessons that focus on wellbeing and practicing the new school routine and rules.
- Even if there is pressure to catch-up lost school time, make time for safe relaxation, play, arts, music, dance and games. These all help academic learning.
- Plan lessons which allow students to do their work independently due to physical distancing rules.



Assess:

- Expect that children and young people will have forgotten skills and knowledge while schools were closed. Reassure children and young people that this will be the case for everyone and that you will work together to catch-up.
- Assess what students are able to remember and adapt the level of the learning content. Identify key areas of knowledge that students need to practice and provide them with constructive feedback.



Adapt:

- Individual children and young people will have had very different experiences of the school closures, so it will be necessary to adapt teaching to meet their individual needs.
- There may be high levels of absent students, particularly in the first weeks of reopening, so adapt lesson plans and do not expect to be able to build on learning from one lesson to the next at first.

Technical Annex 4 - MHPSS for children as schools reopen

When schools reopen, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is essential to ensure a positive, safe transition. Children and young people may feel nervous or reluctant to return to school, especially if they have been at home for months. Some might be concerned because they were unable to learn at home and therefore aware that they may have fallen behind their peers. They may experience stress or anxiety if they fear losing a loved one or have lost a family member or peer. In this transition period, caregivers play an important role in supporting children's and young people's MHPSS, and children and young people themselves can actively support their own wellbeing and support their peers too.

What Can Parents & Caregivers Do?

Just as parents and caregivers supported children's and young people's transition to being at home during COVID-19, they can help prepare children and young people to feel safe and ready to return to school. The MHPSS activities they have practiced at home during school closures can be continued to support a smooth transition.

- **MHPSS activities during school closures** (see pages 4-6 in [English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Arabic](#), & [Swahili](#))
- **Child-friendly stressbusters** (in [English](#) & [Spanish](#))
- [Parenting without Violence activities](#)

When official reopening of schools is confirmed, caregivers can share key messages to help keep children and young people safe and well:

- **Share information** with children and young people on when and how school reopening will happen. Use different formats to communicate (i.e. drawings, songs) to ensure the key messages are understood.
- **Remind children and young people of positive reasons** to return to school. They will be able to play with their friends, see their teachers and continue learning new things. Remind them key people at school they can reach out to for support.
- **Ask children and young people how they feel** about going back to school. Reassure children that all feelings are normal.
- **Take the time to comfort your child** and respond to their needs. No matter how unrealistic their fears may sound, remember their feelings are real and frightening to your child.
- **Help your child understand their emotions.** Say things like "you seem really sad today" or "I can see you are frustrated" to help them begin to label their own feelings.

- **Reassure children and young people about safety measures** in place to keep students and teachers healthy.
- **Encourage children and young people to be agents of change.** They can also help prevent germs spreading by washing their hands with soap and coughing and sneezing into their arm.
- **Prepare children and young people that schools may need to close again** if more people get sick. Reassure them that if schools close again it is so that our communities stay safe and healthy. Continue to remind them that learning can happen anywhere - at school and at home.
- **Tell children you will continue to support their learning** even after they return to school.

What Can Children And Young People Do?

- **Create child-friendly information on MHPSS**, including materials that are inclusive and accessible (i.e., illustrations, audio/video messages, different languages).
- **Identify child-friendly communication channels and share** their MHPSS messages. Ensure channels chosen are inclusive (i.e., do not exclude children without internet access, different languages) and accessible (i.e., different print and audiovisual formats).
- **Support peer-to-peer dialogue about returning to school.** Create a safe space for children to discuss fears, problems and challenges related to returning to school and help find solutions.
- **Explore how children and young people can be agents of change in the reopening process.** Define which issues that children prioritize and which advocacy or awareness-raising actions children can lead. Children can play a leading role in the safe back-to-school campaign (see [Technical Annex 1](#)).
- **Participate in decision-making processes during reopening**, with appropriate support from adults as needed.

MHPSS Coordination: Where they exist, engage in the National Level MHPSS Technical Working Groups to facilitate coordination of MHPSS activities across sectors, including Education, CP and Health.

Technical Annex 5 - Participatory education & protection continuity planning

When COVID-19 forced schools worldwide to close, many communities were shocked and unprepared because plans for education and protection continuity were not in place. School re-opening presents a unique opportunity to work with whole school communities (children, caregivers, teachers, school leadership, community leaders and local government) to assess and improve their disaster preparedness. This guidance recommends three activities to get started. For more activities on safe school management, see this guidance in [English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#).

1. MAP RISKS AND CAPACITIES

Purpose: To help whole school communities understand the safe and unsafe places, practices and persons in and around school and start thinking about ways to reduce the number of unsafe places, practices and persons.

Participants: 15-25 children and adults who represent an inclusive school community, including boys and girls with and without disabilities; caregivers; teachers; school leadership; and key community members. Ideally, participant selection should draw from existing structures like PTAs and child clubs.

Duration: 2-3 hours.

Materials: Flipcharts, markers (at least two colours), and existing assessments or data on safety and protection risks in and around school from government, partners or program staff.

Steps:

1. Introduce perspective: Show participants the image below and ask what they think this is a drawing of. Answers should include both duck/bird and rabbit. Explain to participants that we are all looking at the same picture, but we have different answers. None of our answers are wrong. Just as we can see different animals in this single picture, we can see different risks and capacities in and around our school.



Safeguarding & Child Participation

Before organizing the following activities:

- Remember to adhere to the 9 principles of child participation (in [English](#) & [Spanish](#))
- Ensure referral and MHPSS supports are available during the activities as sensitive or traumatic experiences may be discussed by some participants
- Adapt activities to national physical distancing guidance.

2. Introduce risks and capacities: Divide participants into smaller groups and ask them to define “hazard”, “vulnerability”, “capacity”, and “risk”. Ask each group to share their definitions. Then share the below definitions and table of different types of risks.

- **Hazards** are natural or manmade dangers that can lead to death, psychological or physical injury, or property damage.
- **Vulnerabilities are weaknesses** that come from unique characteristics of the environment, buildings or people. For example, children are generally more vulnerable than adults and need special provisions to ensure their human rights are respected and supported.
- **Capacities are knowledge, skills, and resources available** within a community that can prevent or reduce risks.
- **Risks are what we get when hazards and vulnerabilities exceed the capacity to reduce and cope with them.** Risks only exist where there are vulnerable people and hazards. Risks are smaller if we have capacities to protect ourselves.

3. Draw school map: Ask participants if they have seen any maps and what information maps can show. Divide the participants into smaller groups, separating boys from girls and children from adults to give both genders and age groups an opportunity to discuss their unique risks and capacities. Ask each group to draw a map of their school and the routes to and from school, including geographical features (e.g. coast, mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, fields) and key infrastructure (e.g. school, playground, latrines, water facilities, local quarantine centres, school boundaries, roads, checkpoints).

4. Draw all risks and capacities in the map area: Ask participants if they remember the definition of risk and capacity. Ask them to agree on which color marker will be used to draw risks and which colors for capacities. As the groups work, walk around the room and help keep them on task.

- Ask questions to encourage participants to identify risks in each category, including risks that are not so visible (i.e. How do you feel about using the latrines at school? Do you feel comfortable around the teachers? Do some risks only happen in certain seasons or at certain times of the day?).
- Help those who may be shy or not used to speaking up to share their views.
- Emphasize that although some areas are supposed to be safe, we can feel unsafe and that is ok. This activity will help us identify these unsafe places, so we can make them safer.
- Remember that some risks (e.g. sexual violence) may be sensitive and will not easily be identified. Be aware of the different emotions this may trigger and have a plan for follow up.
- Remind the participants of the opening activity with the rabbit/bird. Ask groups to consider the differences for boys and girls, children with disabilities, and children affected by other diverse factors.
- Encourage each group to include their capacities, too! Sometimes it is easy to only focus on the risks we face, but it is important that this mapping activity emphasize a strength-based approach.

5. Discuss as a group: Ask the groups to come back together. Ask each group to share its map and explain the risks and capacities that were identified. Discuss any differences in the maps. Did children and adults identify different risks and capacities? Did each group think about different risks for boys and girls, children with disabilities or children from other marginalized groups?

6. Create one map that summarizes all the risks and capacities and share widely: Either choose one group map to update with other risks and capacities from all the groups or draw a new map from scratch. Agree on a plan to share your map with the wider school community. This activity can be repeated with multiple classes or child clubs to increase child participation. In sharing the map, make sure you do not expose children for any further risks.

7. Follow up: Ensure all participants see how their feedback has helped inform school decision-making.

2. PLAN FOR EDUCATION AND PROTECTION CONTINUITY

Purpose: To create a school plan for education and protection continuity in an emergency, building on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 experience.

Participants: Same as Activity #1. Consider inviting local government and civil society actors with relevant expertise for education and protection continuity (i.e. local disaster management officials, child protection committee members, etc.)

Duration: 2-3 hours.

Materials: Paper, markers and poster to make final version to post in school. Where available, school's existing education continuity plan and a child-friendly version.

Steps:

1. Introduce education and protection continuity: Tell participants that today they will help update or design a plan for how to continue education and keep children safe and protected in the event of an emergency. Ask participants how they would define 'education continuity' and 'protection continuity', and why they think these concepts are important. After some participants share their answers, introduce the following concepts:

- **Education continuity** concerns maintaining the education of children after their school has been impacted by hazards such as an earthquake, health emergency or conflict.
- **Protection continuity** means ensuring awareness, identification and response to child protection concerns when a hazard (natural or man-made) has occurred which may heighten children's exposure to violence, neglect, exploitation, abuse and physical danger.

2. Reflect on lessons learned from COVID-19: Divide participants into smaller groups (adults separated from children, boys separated from girls) and ask them to reflect on their experience with education and protection continuity during COVID-19. Have measures in place for children or adults who are triggered by discussion. Here are some guiding questions (adapt to context and age of children where necessary):

- What worked well during the school closures that enabled children continue to learn and be safe?
- **What could have been differently during the school closures for children to continue to learn and be safe?**
- **Were any groups of children less able to continue learning? If so, why? Be careful to avoid stigmatization.**
- **If the school had an education and protection continuity plan before COVID-19:** Ask the groups to consider their existing education and protection continuity plan:
 - Did they follow all the steps outlined in their plan? If not, why not?

- Were there any education or protection challenges that this plan did not foresee? If yes, what solutions did the community find during the COVID-19 response?

3. **Update/make an education and protection continuity**

plan: Ask participants to create a plan for educational and protection continuity for their school by filling out the template below:

MAKE UP DAYS/HOURS: If school is disrupted for up to X days per school year, we can make up school hours as follows (include shifts, etc.): _____.

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL LOCATION AND TEMPORARY LEARNING FACILITY: In case of significant damage to school buildings, arrange alternative locations alongside temporary learning facilities.

ALTERNATE MODES OF INSTRUCTION AND FLEXIBLE CALENDAR: How can we keep up with schoolwork, adjust the school calendar and timing, accelerate learning, use peer-to-peer instruction, homework and independent study?

EXTRA CAPACITY: Who can provide teaching and administrative support as well as child protection services if staff are unable to work or need help?

PLAN FOR SCHOOL CLEAN-UP (e.g. in event of flood, explosions, school's use as a temporary health facility or shelter)

PLAN FOR LIMITED USE OF SCHOOL AS TEMPORARY SHELTER: To the extent possible, schools should not be used as temporary shelters or health center. If your school is identified as a temporary shelter/health center in emergency plans, you can plan to minimise the impacts on the school and children's access to education. Consult the [Limiting and Planning for the Use of Schools for Temporary Evacuation Centres in Emergencies](#) guidance, or [Nigeria's guidance on the temporary use of schools as health center or markets during COVID-19](#).

CHILD PROTECTION: How can we protect girls and boys from risks they experience in non-emergency settings and from increased or new risks brought about by the emergency? Be aware of the risks and know how to prevent and respond to different forms of violence children may be exposed to during an emergency if schools close.

HEALTH & NUTRITION: How will school-based services like health checks and school feeding continue if your school closes rapidly due to a new COVID-19 outbreak or other emergency?

STUDENT PARTICIPATION: How will we ensure existing student participation, accountability and feedback mechanisms are supported during an emergency or disaster? How will information be shared with students? How will students be supported to share their feedback and to help shape the actions moving forward?

4. **Share education and protection continuity plan with**

the school community: When participants have finished their plan, ask them to agree on a time/method to share the information with others in the school community to receive feedback and ensure the plan is realistic. This could be done during a meeting with community members and parents/caregivers, during an all-school assembly or by gathering inputs from child clubs. Remind participants to review and update their plan as needed, at least once a year.

Technical Annex 6 - Adaptations for Camp Settings

Populations in camp settings may not have had the same access to education, health, social, and economic supports during lockdown as the general population. Reopening schools and learning spaces in [camps and camp-like settings](#) may require specific considerations to keep educators, children, and their communities safe.

Coordination

- **Apply movement systems to minimize contact on the way to and from school.** With CCCM, consider developing or adapting existing movement systems (e.g. one-way systems) on the routes to school. Similar measures may have already been developed for activities such as food distribution or market attendance. Ideally, involve children and PTAs in adapting these for schools and to make them child-friendly.
- **Plan for decontamination.** In some cases, schools are used for alternative purposes during school closure (e.g., quarantine, distribution points, or market facilities). When schools plan to reopen, advance planning between school/education authorities and the relevant counterparts that were using the space (Health/FSL) and CCCM is needed to prepare for the space to return to its educational function, including disinfection, repairs, and returning the school furniture.
- **Share accessible, inclusive key messages:** Families in camps may have more limited access to information. They might not receive messages in a language they understand. Schools should reinforce the key RCCE messages in a child-friendly, inclusive and accessible way.
- **Prepare for future school closures.** Preposition hygiene and WASH materials; print and display hygiene messaging in schools; procure learning supplies for distance learning.

Physical Distancing

- **Adopt multiple shifts and staggered start and end times** to avoid overcrowding in classrooms and at the school entrance. Where a shift system existed before COVID-19 and the addition of more shifts is not feasible, work with health authorities to determine how children can continue to safely learn.
- **Create shifts by grouping students from different zones/areas** of the camp to minimize contact on the way to and from school and avoid congestion in public areas.
- **Shifts or schedules for play spaces.** The opportunity to play is critical for children's wellbeing, and schools in camps may be one of the only spaces where

children can access spaces and equipment for play. To ensure all children can exercise their right to play while also maintaining physical distance, consider creating a schedule for play area(s), with allocated education personnel or caregiver volunteers to supervise children's distancing.

Whole School Community

- **Children:** In a camp environment, there are many pressures on children not to continue their education and to adopt negative coping strategies. Organize outreach activities to reconnect children who have stopped learning during school closures. Where possible with physical distancing, tent-to-tent visits are invaluable.
- **Caregivers:** Organize sessions with caregivers to share information about the school reopening process to reassure them of their children's safety and orient on physical distancing rules. See [Technical Annex 4](#) for MHPSS tips on reducing stress during the reopening phase.
- **Teachers:** Train teachers on key hygiene and MHPSS messages and new physical distancing rules for school reopening. Provide psychosocial support and stress management/wellbeing training for teachers. See [Technical Annex 5](#) for resources.

Protection

- Children in camps may have experienced **more stigmatization and reduced freedom of movement** during this period. MHPSS services for children will therefore be critical (see [Technical Annex 4](#)).
- Lockdowns will have **worsened families' economic situations, and increased stress in confined spaces.** Abuse and neglect of children, and the use of negative coping mechanisms are expected to increase. Schools and education personnel should coordinate with camp-based Child Protection service providers and be prepared to identify and report concerns.

Technical Annex 7: Additional Considerations for Early Learning Programmes (ELPs)

Additional actions may be needed when reopening early learning programmes – such as pre-schools and day-care - for young children under six years. This annex focuses on addressing three main challenges specific to young children:

- 1. Prevention of COVID-19 transmission:** This may be more difficult given that young children are less able to cover sneezes or coughs, wear cloth face coverings (and should not use coverings/masks at all if under two years), physically distance from peers, refrain from touching and putting objects in their mouths, and may need to be held and comforted if upset or ill.
- 2. Small group Learning:** How to create spaces with sufficient teachers to offer safe, playful and engaging activities, given that more teachers may be needed while existing staff may have been assigned to primary grades or migrated away.
- 3. Home learning:** How to strengthen the capacities of parents/caregivers – both women and men - given that the home learning environment is one of the most significant contributors to improving child wellbeing and early learning outcomes, and tackling inequity.

In addition to the actions in the main guide, ELP managers or administrators can:

- Prepare the reopening plan with parents/caregivers, discussing their responsibilities towards measures to prevent COVID-19 transmission, and how they can support the continued learning and successful return to school of their young children – girls and boys.
- Install handwashing stations with visual reminders at entrances and inside the ELP that are accessible to young children, including children with disabilities.
- Establish a system to screen young children for signs of COVID-19 infection before they enter the ELP, as they may not be as able as older children to tell their caregivers they are feeling unwell. **CDC Guidance for Childcare that Remains Open** [ENG](#)
- Confirm which staff should not return because of risk of serious illness if infected with the coronavirus, and link staff who are anxious about returning to work to MHPSS.
- Identify measures to improve the adult-child ratio to promote physical distancing: identify and train community members to address staffing gaps; use shifts, safe alternative community spaces and alternate day approaches. Consider prioritizing particular groups to return first, such as children who

will enter primary school next year and children from more disadvantaged groups.

- Ensure teachers, support staff and volunteers are trained on positive classroom management, play-based learning, caregiver capacity building, PSS and SEL support, safeguarding, and infection prevention measures, in line with government regulations. [See Technical Annex 2.](#)
- Ensure that teachers do not feel pressured to catch children up in literacy, numeracy, etc. as soon as the ELP reopens. If formative assessments are required, these should be conducted only by teachers who have been previously trained.
- Ensure that teachers are able to screen children for acute malnutrition, neglect and family violence, and refer children and families to existing services, including food assistance.
- Remove play materials and furnishings that cannot be washed and disinfected regularly (soft toys or toys with intricate parts) as well as toothbrushes and other personal hygiene items that may be shared and are a transmission risk.
- Increase outdoor learning time because the risk of infection is lower outside, while ensuring standard safety measures are in place.
- Ensure staff are fairly compensated for the additional hours that will be spent working; for instance, to clean toys and spaces.
- Reduce the number of visitors to the early learning space, including limiting caregivers from entering the facilities unless necessary.

Early Learning staff can:

- Support physical distancing by dividing the class into small groups, with each group cared for by one teacher. Where staff have to care for two small groups, set up free play sessions for each and only intervene if necessary.
- Organize play and learning materials into kits that can be used with small groups or by individual children. Ensure that materials are not transferred to another small group, unless they are washed and disinfected beforehand. Bring out only the materials that will be used that day. Clean and disinfect materials between shifts and at the end of the session.
- Promote children's wellbeing and socio-emotional learning, by establishing a predictable routine integrating playful learning and mindfulness activities. Use art, puppets, storytelling and play to help children

understand what is happening, make sense of their feelings, learn how to stay safe, reconnect with friends, and gain a sense of control. **Talking about COVID with young children** [ENG](#) **Sesame Street Caring for Each Other** [ENG](#) **COVIBOOK** [multiple languages](#); **Mindfulness activities for 3 - 5-year-olds** [ENG](#)

- Make additional play/learning materials and big books from recycled materials, household items and light fabrics *that are easy-to-wash*, as well as natural materials (i.e. leaves, sticks, stones etc). **Toy-making Guide for ELPs** [ENG](#)
- Use stories, songs and activities to promote good handwashing and respiratory hygiene practices at key moments (including on arrival, after outside playtime). Ensure frequent, **supervised** handwashing with water and soap as part of the daily routine, assisting the very young and children with disabilities where needed. Supervise children if alcohol-based rub is used, to ensure that they do not swallow any.
- Recognize young children who may be experiencing psychosocial distress through changes in their behaviours: both boys and girls may cry more, be more clingy, be aggressive towards others, have trouble sleeping, stop talking or eating, go back to “baby behaviours”. Refer those in high distress to specialised services. [See Technical Annex 4, Psychosocial Support for Children during COVID-19](#) [ENG](#) **Helping young children feel safe** [ENG](#).
- Follow a regular schedule for contacting families about home learning for their child(ren). Prepare simple kits of books and play and learning materials to send home in the event of further closures, and continue remote parenting programmes (activity posters, messaging app groups, radio programming etc.).
- Identify and link caregivers in high distress to MHPSS.

Parents and caregivers can:

- Ensure that their children do not bring items, such as toys, from home to the ELP, unless these are absolutely essential for their wellbeing.
- Ensure that only one person drops off and picks up their child(ren) every day, without entering the learning space.
- Continue activities at home to support young children’s learning and psychosocial wellbeing and participate in or lead parenting programmes (in person and/or remote) to strengthen wellbeing and skills for nurturing care. **Playful Parenting Activity Booklet** [ENG](#), **Weekly home-learning schedules** [ENG](#), **UNICEF Playtime Anytime** [ENG](#), **COVID Positive Parenting Tip-sheets** [90 languages](#) **Parenting Without Violence** [ENG](#)

See UNICEF/World Bank Global Guidance on Reopening of Early Childhood Education Settings Post-COVID19 for more detailed recommendations (forthcoming).

Technical Annex 8 – Advocacy Messages

Safe back-to-school planning and re-opening of schools

- Governments, in consultation with their Ministries of Education, Social Welfare and Health, teachers unions, and other key actors, must be responsible for deciding and planning for the safe reopening of schools, always prioritizing the interest, protection, rights, wellbeing and inclusion of *all* children, particularly girls and other marginalised groups, and including those who were not in school before the pandemic. This planning phase should start as early as possible. Refer to the [UN Framework for Reopening Schools](#).
- Governments must involve the whole school community in back-to-school planning. Child rights should be recognized and children seen as agents of change and their participation supported and respected. Whole school communities including school leaders, teachers and caregivers must participate and these approaches should be inclusive and accessible for all.
- Governments should plan for a safe return to school and have an education continuity plan in place that prepares for and reduces the risk of a second wave. This plan should be based on WASH, health and education measures and include specific guidance on school disinfection and the provision of inclusive, accessible, gender-sensitive wash facilities. It should also be coordinated with relevant clusters or coordination groups and stakeholders.

Ensure the safety and protection of children and teachers so that no child is left behind

- Governments should utilize data [tools](#) on student absences and use the reasons for those absences to inform local and national decision-making to target back to school initiatives, and school and community-wide education, health and child protection interventions.
- Governments should use gender analysis to understand increasing inequalities resulting from school closures and confinement that have particularly affected marginalized children such as children with disabilities and girls from poor households. They should consider proven solutions to address them, including cash transfers to address increased poverty and increase enrolment and retention of more marginalized groups.
- Governments should pay attention to the wellbeing, psychosocial and protection needs of children, particularly girls and other marginalised groups, that may have grown significantly during the confinement. These needs should be assessed, and

resources must be put in place to meet them. School reopening protocols should not cause additional distress for children, and teachers and educational staff capacities in MHPSS, SEL and knowledge of referral mechanisms must be strengthened.

- Governments should support systems to identify children experiencing protection risks due to COVID19 (i.e. child labor, child recruitment, SGBV and child marriage) and support services to address their needs and transition them back to school.

Ensure a safe transition back to school

- Governments need to ensure a smooth transition back to the classroom for *all* children to prevent the most vulnerable learners from dropping out. This includes overcoming indirect barriers to education, e.g. housework, caregiving and transport costs. [Accelerated education programs](#) (AEPs), remedial or catch-up classes and/or after-school classes should be established, as well as implementing flexible learning measures. See INEE for more on [accelerated education](#).

Build back better and strengthen the resilience of the education system

- Governments should plan this return to school with the aim of “building back better”, strengthening the resilience of education systems to reach all children and addressing bottlenecks and barriers to education for girls and other marginalised groups. This can be done by addressing inequities, gender- and [crisis-sensitive planning](#), addressing gaps such as inadequate WASH facilities and ensuring that quality distance learning activities that reach children previously out of school are maintained.
- A process to document good practices and lessons learned and prepare for the next crisis should be prioritized. At the school level, this should take the form of an inclusive and participatory update or development of a school's educational continuity plan including children's voices.
- Governments should review their School Health and Nutrition (SHN) policies and Ministries of Health and Education mobilized to allocate increased budget to funding SHN implementation and monitoring, including critical WASH and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) elements.



May 2020

Photo Credit: World Vision in Zimbabwe improving access to education for children during COVID-19 lock down. While observing social distancing school children are doing numeracy and literacy activities, they receive from their parents via WhatsApp groups during the national COVID-19 lock down.

This guide was developed thanks to inter-agency collaboration from members of the Global Education Cluster's Strategic Advisory Group, including: Finn Church Aid, INEE, Nile Hope, Norwegian Refugee Council, Plan International, Save the Children, UNHCR, UNESCO IIEP, War Child UK, World Vision International. The Child Protection Area of Responsibility also reviewed and endorsed this guide.

Save the Children supported the initial drafting and design.