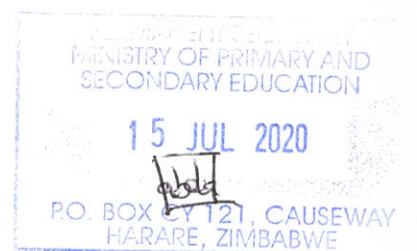




Zimbabwe

MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Standard Operating Procedures for the Prevention and Management of COVID-19 and other Influenza Like Illnesses in the Primary and Secondary Education Sector.



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Introduction

The experience of COVID-19 has highlighted the need to ensure the safety of both learners, teachers and support staff during times of local and global public health pandemics.

In light of this, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, with technical support from the Ministry of Health and Child Care, has developed these Standard Operating Procedures which are meant to guide Senior and Middle Management, school level leadership, teachers, learners, and all stakeholders on how to conduct business in a safe and healthy environment for all.

Application

These procedures apply to schools and independent colleges that are registered under the Education Amendment Act No. 15 of 2020 as well as all Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education offices, centres and institutional accommodation premises for staff.

For the protection of all learners, staff and visitors at any school or independent college, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education offices, centres or institutional accommodation premises for staff, strict compliance to these Standard Operational Procedures is required by all.

Failure to observe these guidelines would compromise the health and safety of all and thus be in breach of the Public Health Act and relevant prevention and control measures for COVID-19 or any other epidemic prone disease or outbreak.

Accordingly, Heads of Office at National, Provincial, District and School level have the responsibility to ensure and enforce compliance, noting that failure to observe the seriousness of this matter attracts disciplinary action.

- 1. COVID-19 and Influenza-like Illnesses Preparedness - Checklist of requirements for COVID-19 preparedness per school, Independent College, Education Office, Centre or Staff accommodation facility**

In order to ensure the safety of members of staff and learners, Heads of Institutions should ensure that the following are in place in the required quantities.

- a) Infra-red thermometer (ratio of 1:300 to 500 individuals)
- b) Handwashing stations at the entrance and other strategic points, with liquid soap and clean running water
- c) Liquid soap in stock
- d) Alcohol-based hand sanitisers, where handwashing is not always feasible upon entry.
- e) Face masks or face-shields that meet stipulated health standards.
- f) A valid school disinfection certificate from the Environmental Health Department.
- g) A gender-balanced team of School Health or Station Coordinators, trained in COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control and with Ministry of Health and Child Care-issued certificates of attendance.
- h) Appropriate protective gowns for School Health Coordinators.
- i) Gloves for specific use, as recommended by local Health experts allocated to the schools from the Ministry of Health and Child Care.
- j) A designated temporary isolation holding bay for any learner or member of staff or visitor identified to be unwell, to wait for further health attention from the contacted Rapid Response Team from the Ministry of Health and Child Care.
- k) Information Education and Communication materials.
- l) Clearly displayed contact details of local clinic or Ministry of Health and Child Care team allocated per school.

NB: the list of requirements will be updated depending on the nature of the public health pandemic at the particular time.

2. School Health Coordinators

School Heads should make sure that a team of teachers to perform the function of School Health Coordinators is appointed at every station. The School Health Coordinators should receive training, including refresher workshops, from the Ministry of Health and Child Care before schools open, to enable them to manage minor health-related cases at the school level.

The same applies to independent colleges and other institutions registered for primary and secondary education teaching and learning purposes.

A clear supervisory structure for the School Health coordination team and its record keeping system should be available for inspection at all times.

3. Station Health Coordinators

At every Primary and Secondary Education Office, centre or residential premise, a Health Coordination Team should be appointed, trained and supervised in the performance of this health promotion function.

4. Health Promotion Activities

Every Primary and Secondary Education office, centre, school/college or staff residential premise should conduct regular health awareness programs in which they educate every member about communicable and non-communicable diseases of public health concern.

For COVID-19 and other influenza-like illnesses, this includes prevention, appropriate and frequent handwashing, respiratory hygiene, use of face masks, the selection and use of any other appropriate personal protective equipment, social/physical distancing, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, symptoms of COVID-19, and what to do when one feels unwell. Evidence of such should be readily available in the school/college or institutional records upon request.

5. Face-masks and face shields/guards

Under the COVID-19 regulations, the wearing of face-masks is compulsory to all learners and school staff. Learners and staff should use clean masks every day provided by the school. Visitors to the school should be minimized wherever possible. All visitors to the school should be entertained on condition that, they are putting on their face-masks.

Strict compliance with the Standards Association of Zimbabwe guidelines on the manufacture, frequency of changing and number of washes per reusable cloth face masks should be promoted through training and use of multi-media information materials.

The use of face shields should be in compliance with recommendations from the Ministry of Health and Child Care.

6. Gloves

Each classroom should have access to gloves for use by learners and teachers when handling tasks and materials where there is possible risk of having their hands contaminated. To avoid

the unintended spread of germs through the use of gloves, their use in school settings should be closely guided by the local Health experts from the Ministry of Health and Child Care.

Used gloves should be disposed of immediately after use into designated rubbish bins which will then be taken away for proper disposal, preferably by burning or incineration.

The school should ensure the safety of learners when disposing of these gloves.

7. Care and Maintenance of Protective Gowns for School Health Coordinators

The choice, use, washing and storage of protective gowns used by School Health Coordinators should be in compliance with guidelines from the local Environmental Health Technician or local clinic.

8. Social/Physical Distancing

Under COVID-19 prevention measures, education leadership should lead by example in promoting consistent physical distancing and the avoidance of social contact in all human interactions.

Teachers and learners should be encouraged to maintain a distance of at least 1 meter between everyone present at school/college. The seating arrangement in every classroom and in the staff-room should be such that, there is a distance of 1 meter from one individual to the other.

In order to achieve this, there should be one learner at each desk or the school should improvise the 'desk and chair' approach. A standard sized classroom should therefore not accommodate more than 35 learners.

Social/physical distancing should also be practised at assembly, meal times, playgrounds and in boarding hostels.

The same precautions apply for the prevention of influenza-like illnesses.

The use of bunk beds in hostels is therefore prohibited.

9. Handshakes, touching, hugging, and any other bodily contact

These should be completely avoided. Non-contact greetings should be promoted and emphasized.

10. Hand washing stations in schools /colleges

Each classroom should have access to a functional handwashing facility where learners and teachers use running water and liquid soap to clean their hands. Such facilities should also be available at entry points, and at designated places within the school premises for use by all.

The same should be available in the administration offices and boarding hostels.

Liquid soap should always be available at these hand washing stations and practical measures should be taken to avoid wastage.

11. Hand Sanitization

Regular handwashing with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds is the first line of hygienic self-defence. Therefore handwashing stations should strategically be placed at entry points, near toilets and by the classroom doors.

Where possible, schools may add alcohol-based hand-sanitisers at every entry point where learners, teachers, and stakeholders are sanitized upon entry into the school premises.

In areas where consistent handwashing is a challenge, there should also be alcohol-based hand sanitizers at every entry point to a classroom for use by learners and teachers.

Handwashing stations should also be available at every entry point to hostels in the case of boarding schools. Where available, alcohol based hand sanitisers may also be provided at boarding hostels.

Due caution should be taken on the storage and use of alcohol-based hand sanitisers, noting the flammable alcohol content.

12. Screening for COVID-19 at Schools and Independent Colleges

There should be at least one Infra-red thermometer at every entry and exit point to the school/college where learners, the staff, and stakeholders are screened for COVID-19.

At entry into the school by all staff, learners and visitors, such screening should be focused on body temperature and history of fever, cough or difficulty in breathing especially in the previous 24 hours.

Persons found with high temperatures should not be allowed to enter the premises, but politely directed to the temporary isolation holding-bay to await further attention from the

Ministry of Health and Child Care. This is one of the many duties of the School Health Coordinators.

13. Visitors

During public health lockdown periods, schools/colleges are advised to limit visitors to the extent possible, and to allow only those that are most essential.

14. Unwell staff members and learners-

If a learner or member of staff is sick, she/he should not come to school.

Schools and independent colleges should enforce the policy of "staying at home if unwell" for learners, teachers, or school staff with symptoms.

School Health Coordinators should avail contact details of the Ministry of Health and Child Care team allocated to each school for members to quickly access health services where necessary.

Additionally, the School Health Coordinator should also connect with other local organizations available to provide home care support and ensure communication between home and school.

15. Temporary Isolation Holding Bays

Every school shall establish a Temporary Isolation Holding Bay where learners, staff members or visitors who have been identified through screening to be in need of further health attention and/ or management, can rest comfortably as they await the arrival of health service providers.

A Temporary Isolation Holding Bay is an identified space, clearly marked for the safe separation of individuals screened and identified for further COVID-19 assessment. It should have physically distanced sitting places and supervised by a specific School Health Coordinator at a time.

16. Action to take after contact with known COVID-19 Infected persons

When it is established that any learner or member of staff has had contact with any identified individual with confirmed positive COVID-19 test results, the Head of the institution should immediately notify the local health service provider for guidance while the learner or staff member stays away from school or, if already at school, waits in the Temporary Isolation Holding Bay .

17. Sharing of materials, equipment, eating utensils, linen or clothing

Sharing materials such as pens, textbooks, rubbers, rulers, and pencils, any type of equipment, eating utensils, linen or clothing should also be avoided at all costs.

18. Cleaning of ablution facilities at schools/ colleges

Schools and colleges should ensure compliance with regular cleaning schedules for different parts of their premises on a daily basis.

Consistent supply of water and soap/detergent and disinfectant is key.

Toilets for both learners and staff are to be cleaned and disinfected at least three times a day, i.e. at break time, lunch, and on dismissal.

Where schools cannot afford to hire cleaners, local arrangements should be made with parents for adults to perform this cleaning function and to ensure the supervision and safety of any learners as they perform this life-skill training task.

19. Ventillation

To minimize the spread of COVID-19 or any other influenza-like illnesses, maximum ventilation of closed spaces is strongly encouraged. Windows and doors should be kept open to allow for full circulation of fresh air.

20. Refuse disposal at schools/colleges

Each classroom should have a covered bin for the disposal of potentially biohazardous waste, as guided by the local Environmental Health Technician.

Disposal of such waste should be by burning or burying on a daily basis. The same applies to waste disposal in administration offices and boarding hostels.

21. Disinfecting frequently touched surfaces in school/college settings

Apart from the major disinfection of all the school buildings and grounds that should take place before schools open, schools should clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, desks, toys, supplies, light switches, doorframes, play equipment, teaching aids used by children, and covers of books twice a day. For COVID-19, the World Health Organisation recommends use of 70% ethyl alcohol to disinfect small surface areas and equipment.

Similar hygienic precautions are recommended for other influenza-like illnesses.

22. Sporting activities

All sporting activities, including matches, choral practice, indoor games, and festivals are prohibited until further notice.

However, low-risk sport as defined by Statutory Instrument 110 of 2020 Public Health (COVID-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) (Amendment) Order, 2020 (No. 8) may be permitted in schools, but public health and social measures including screening, hand washing and physical distancing should be practiced and maintained at all times.

23. School Feeding

Schools should intensify the Home Grown School Feeding Programme, where learners are provided with hot, nutritionally balanced meals at school.

The storage, preparation and serving of school meals and cleaning of utensils should always be in full compliance with the Food Safety Standards.

All food handlers to have valid Public Health Screening Certificates.

Only hot, freshly cooked food to be served under the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme.

Clear guidelines should be communicated to parents and learners. Learners should not share food either brought from home or served at the school since this increases the risk of transmitting COVID-19 or other diseases.

Similar hygienic precautions are recommended for other influenza-like illnesses and notifiable diseases of public health importance.

24. Play centres, sporting equipment and sporting facilities

The use of these facilities by learners is prohibited since they may facilitate transmission of the coronavirus among learners and facilitators.

The use of these facilities should only resume when the facilitators have been fully trained on COVID-19 infection prevention and control measures and provided with disinfectants as well as guidelines for the protection of learners and themselves.

Schools and colleges need to assess what they could do to limit risk of exposure, or direct physical contact during physical education lessons, whilst learners should still observe social distancing.

Practical lessons and demonstrations can be done but great caution must be taken, to avoid endangering both learners' and teachers' health. Emphasis should be on reducing numbers at a time and strict observance of physical distancing.

Learners and staff with signs and symptoms of other influenza-like illnesses should not attend school and, if present, be referred to the Temporary Isolation Holding Bay for further health attention.

25. Transporting learners and staff members to and from school

Schools should educate learners, parents and the school community on the importance of physical distancing when learners walk to and from school.

Hand hygiene and physical distancing measures should be practiced on school buses as learners commute to and from school. Windows on school buses should be kept open for maximum ventilation.

The number of persons per seat should be guided by regulations for the public transport sector.

Staff and learners who use public transport should be regularly be reminded on COVID-19 health and hygiene safety precautions.

26. Health Service providers per school

In line with the Zimbabwe School Health Policy, every school should be linked to a specific clinic or team from the Ministry of Health and Child Care service providers. Through this system, schools should develop effective communication with their allocated health teams to facilitate the care of unwell learners and staff.

Accordingly, every District Education Office should have a clearly documented system of linking each school and college to a specific health facility and specific team with publicly displayed contact details. Through this system prompt response mechanisms to attend to individual learners, staff members or visitors with public health notifiable signs and symptoms should be established.

27. Suspected contact with confirmed COVID-19 infected individuals

Schools and colleges should ensure that, staff members and learners who are suspected to have been in contact with a confirmed COVID-19 infected person, do stay at home for 14 days. The school officials should immediately notify public health authorities in cases of suspected contact by any learner, member of staff or visitors with any identified positive COVID-19 infected individual(s).

28. Parental involvement

It is the role of the school to inform parents about the measures the school is putting in place to combat the spread of the coronavirus. The school should take effective steps to obtain the cooperation from parents/ guardians in reporting any cases of COVID-19 that occur in the household. If someone in any of the households within the school community is suspected to have had exposure to COVID-19, the parents/guardians should keep their child at home and urgently inform the school.

29. Additional school related measures

Schools and colleges should explain to the learners the reason for school-related measures, including discussing the scientific considerations whilst highlighting the help they can get through schools (e.g. psychosocial support). Boarding schools and other specialized sections of the institution need to extend these considerations to residential facilities, lecture halls, laboratories, and other learning facilities for the all-round benefit and safety of learners, staff and visitors.

30. Break and lunchtimes

Schools to stagger recess/breaks and lunch breaks.

If staggering is difficult, one alternative is for learners to have lunch at their individual desks.

31. Mixing of classes

Schools should limit movements and avoid mixing of learners for lessons and after school activities.

For example, learners in a class should stay in one classroom throughout the day, while teachers move between classrooms, for secondary schools.

32. Hot-seating

To cater for physical distancing, it is recommended that Heads of Institutions make arrangements to expand the school timetable, with some learners and teachers attending in the morning and others in the afternoon as a way of decongesting schools during the day.

33. Boarding Hostel Staff

All boarding Masters and Matrons should be trained, together with all categories of hostel staff, to ensure the health and safety of learners in boarding as well as to safeguard their own health at the workplace and that of all staff.

Strict health and hygiene routines should be designed for consistent safeguarding of learners' and staff health in boarding hostels with particular attention to the following-:

- a) Physical spacing of beds
- b) Laundry arrangements
- c) Non-mixing or sharing of linen, toiletries and food items
- d) Sharing of lockers
- e) Disinfection schedule for bathroom and toilets
- f) Arrangement and monitoring of the sick bay
- g) Preparation, serving and sitting arrangements at meal-times
- h) Undelayed notification of parents/guardians when learner is unwell
- i) Supervision and management of bath-times and leisure-time activities.
- j) Visitors

34. Learners in Informal Boarding Arrangements

Heads of schools should work with their Child Protection Committees to ensure the health and safety of all learners attending day schools and because of long walking distances, are staying in informal boarding places. Maximum COVID-19 prevention measures should be ensured in all such residential arrangements for learners, together with all other safeguarding requirements.

35. Psycho-educational support

Guidance and Counselling - Life skills orientation activities should be enriched to provide learners with safe spaces to ventilate their thoughts and feelings as well as seek help on COVID-19 and other challenges in their lives.

The prevention of stigma and discrimination against individuals infected or affected by COVID-19 or any other health or social condition should be incorporated into the school ethos.

36. Overcrowding when leaving school

Schools to create awareness to ensure learners do not gather and socialize when leaving the school and during their free time.

37. Learners and Staff with Underlying conditions

Schools should establish learners and staff members with underlying conditions or special needs and have records of such.

The local Health facility should regularly assess and advise on additional protective measures to address any identified COVID-19 or other Public health infection risks to any learner or member of staff who has self-declared his/her underlying health condition that may predispose them to danger.

Stigma and discrimination against such individuals should be avoided at all cost.

38. Extra measures for learners and staff with disabilities

In line with the principle of inclusion, appropriate safeguarding modifications to all the measures outlined in these Standard Operational Procedures should be implemented at every school, independent college or other primary and secondary education station, to adequately respond to the disability-related special needs of each individual learner, member of staff or visitor.