



GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone COVID-19 School Reopening Guidelines

2020/2021 Academic Year

Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education

Summary Guidelines

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), in collaboration with stakeholders including the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS), the National COVID-19 Emergency Response Center (NaCOVERC), the Presidential Scientific and Technical Advisory Group for Emergencies: COVID-19, the Teaching Service Commission (TSC), the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU), the Council of Principals for Secondary Schools (CPSS), the National Council of Head Teachers (NaCoHT) and members of Civil Society Organizations presents the following guidelines for school re-opening for the 2020/2021 academic year. These guidelines are informed by national healthcare data, the national contexts and policies and international best practice.

Goals: There are three broad goals for these guidelines which seek to promote and ensure safe reopening of schools and continued learning for all children in Sierra Leone:

- I. To prevent COVID-19 transmission in schools.
- II. To quickly respond and mitigate onward transmission where infection occurs at schools.
- III. To clearly communicate with parents and the community the status of testing and infection rates at schools and any subsequent changes in guidelines.

Prevention

1. All children in Primary and Secondary schools are required to wear face coverings (masks) while on a school bus and at school and must adhere to the national mask guide. Preschool children are not required to wear masks. Parents or Guardians of Preschool children who drop off or pick up children must wear masks.
2. Children with known medical conditions must indicate this to school administration for exemption and other precautionary measures. Note: Parents must provide masks for their children. Teachers must enforce mask wearing on the school grounds and in classrooms.
3. All teachers, care providers and auxiliary staff on a school bus and at school are required to wear face coverings (masks). Face shields are recommended during teaching particularly for caregiving to deaf children who rely on lip syncing or during music class.
4. All food vendors in school compounds must wear face coverings and be subjected to temperature checks. Hand washing stations should be available where food is sold. Vendors must enforce physical distancing measures. Failure to abide will



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mean privilege to sell food at schools is withdrawn. Limited number of vendors should be allowed. All schools should ensure staggered break times for the different school levels.

5. All students, staff and visitors should wash their hands (or use alcohol-based rub/sanitizers where available) when entering school buses and compounds. Handwashing stations have been provided to all schools in Sierra Leone. School managements/proprietors, NGOs, Partners and the communities must provide clean water and soap to support effective sanitary processes.
6. All students, staff, Government officials and visitors are required to undergo temperature checks when entering school buses and compounds. Infrared thermometers have been provided to all schools in Sierra Leone. Persons using the thermometers should be trained on calibration of the thermometers to avoid false reading. Ensure daily calibration with documentation of the infrared thermometers. School heads should monitor the documentation of calibration.
7. All schools must have at least one teacher who has been trained on *the School Reopening Protocol and Psychosocial Support Framework* at all times. The trained teacher should be linked to the local healthcare facility for medical professional advice and medical care when needed. Government has completed the training of trainers and two teachers for all schools.
8. Interactions and mingling of adults with students will be strictly on a need basis (examples include care provision, teaching, food provision, mentoring, etc.). Visitors to schools are limited to official and required reasons only. Exemptions must be sought through the Principals and Head Teachers.
9. Where there are two different schools in the same compound (e.g. JSS and SSS), the health and lunch breaks must be staggered by the school administration so that each school level has a different time.
10. School shift systems pre-COVID-19, except where additional structures have been constructed, will continue as they were. The schools will communicate the individual school start-end timing for the morning and afternoon shifts informed by the National School Timetable developed by the Ministry and stakeholders.
11. To limit class sizes in JSS1, MBSSE will use an algorithm to place class 6 students into schools where they do not get into their schools of preference. Home and school address will be used as a factor for placement in addition to NPSE scores. Admission and interview processes for incoming students (JSS1 and SSS1) must be spaced out to adhere to physical distancing and NaCOVERC COVID-19 guidelines.
12. Proper ventilation and airflow should be ensured for all enclosed spaces and physical distancing measures promoted in classrooms as much as possible. Some schools may find it easier than others. Where possible outdoor activities should be enhanced.
13. School gatherings including School Assemblies and Prayers are limited to class level only. No activity should bring an entire school in the same space at any single



- time. This means, all school-wide activities/celebrations like Thanksgivings, Prize Givings, Sports Meets, etc. are banned for all schools.
14. There will be limited or no interaction between pupils in different classes at all times. Physical and social distancing must be maintained during (lunch) breaks. This will be monitored and enforced by teachers.
 15. All schools must be cleaned daily with appropriate detergents (soap or at least 70% alcohol). Deep cleaning with appropriate detergents (for example chlorine-based detergents) is recommended once a week. Schools earlier used as part of the response were cleaned prior to the partial school reopening for examination candidates.
 16. To use a school bus, all children should adhere to the following protocols/guidelines: wear a face covering or mask, be subjected to temperature checks, and use hand sanitizers before boarding. Buses should not be overloaded, and social distancing must be maintained while waiting to board.
 17. Interior bus surfaces must be cleaned (wiped down) after every session. Deep cleaning must happen every week.
 18. All persons who fail temperature checks will be refused access to school facilities (bus and school compound) unless they have an accompanying diagnosis from a health professional indicating that the symptoms are non-COVID related. A current seven-day negative COVID-19 test can also be used as an exception for access.
 19. All other NaCOVERC Guidelines remain applicable.

Response and Mitigation of Onward Transmission

20. All schools will maintain active lists of contacts for parents/guardians of all pupils and staff.
21. All schools will maintain a daily updated attendance list including reasons for absences for all pupils and staff. The Teaching Service Commission will continue the pilot and roll out the Sierra Leone Education Attendance Monitoring System for teachers.
22. If a child, teacher or staff member has COVID-19 related symptoms, they should communicate with the school, stay at home, and get tested. Please call the toll-free 117 line for tests and other COVID-19 related information. People who get tested should only return after a negative test result.
23. Below are guidelines that will inform school-based, catchment area and national response strategies when positive cases are recorded:
 - a. For every two recorded positive cases per class within seven consecutive days, the entire class will be required to stay home for at least 7 calendar days. Symptoms will be monitored, and self-check assessments conducted. All contacts of a COVID-19 positive case including classmates and teachers will be swabbed and tested informed by the generated close contact list. Complementary learning materials will be provided to the class or



accelerated teaching (including the radio teaching programs) provided upon return so that students do not get left behind.

- b. If at least 20% of separate classrooms are closed at the same time (within a 14-day period), **the entire school will be closed for 14 calendar days**. The school will undergo deep cleaning, a random set of staff, and teachers and pupils will be swabbed for testing.
- c. If a teacher tests positive, his/her colleagues are tested based on the generated primary contact list. The classes where the teacher taught will be monitored and a random set of pupils swabbed and tested. If a teacher in a preschool or primary school tests positive for COVID-19, all the students in the classroom must be swabbed and tested – this is because preschool or primary school teachers spend prolonged periods of time with their students. An alternate teacher will be provided to that class where possible with complementary learning materials provided for the pupils.
- d. In rural areas, if 10% of schools within a catchment area (e.g. within a 3-mile radius) are closed because of cases, other **schools in the same catchment area will be closed for a period of 14 days**. Students and teachers will be swabbed and tested for COVID-19 on re-opening of those schools.
- e. In urban areas, catchment area or universal school closures will be determined using a different metric to be established and communicated by DiCOVERC in collaboration with MBSSE.
- f. National school closures will be determined by the NaCOVERC and the Presidential Taskforce for COVID-19 informed by national health data.
- g. Complementary Learning: The Radio Teaching Program of the MBSSE, TSC and Education Sector Partners and physical support materials will continue to complement teaching and learning at schools.

24. When a child falls sick with COVID-19 symptoms, they will be isolated in the identified room following the school safety protocol on which all schools have been trained.

Communication

25. NaCOVERC will continue to record data for the profession of all tested persons, in particular teachers and students. Where pupils and teachers test positive, the Ministry and schools will be informed accordingly. However, it is also the primary responsibility of the parents, teachers and staff to inform their schools of their testing and their status.
26. School management has the responsibility to inform MBSSE Deputy Directors of Education and Supervisors on a regular basis of testing and status data for their schools. Records must be submitted to the District Education Office for review every 14 days.



27. Appropriate school authorities will be informed of any COVID-19 cases within 24 hours of positive case confirmation. Currently the average time from specimen collection to the release of result is 72 hours.
28. Teachers must talk to their students about COVID-19 signs and symptoms, transmission and prevention measures, daily before commencement of the first class.
29. Pupils will be encouraged to inform their parents of COVID-19 status and updated guidelines for prevention and treatment. Parents and guardians are advised to regularly communicate with their children and wards about COVID-19 cases in the community and to take preventive measures when children leave to and return from school.
30. To help create the COVID 19 awareness, all school buses and premises must have Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials posted in strategic areas within the school buses and premises. In addition to this, IEC audio tapes (or TV screen if available) should be played in the school bus. This is to help remind students, teachers and auxiliary staff on basic public measures.

Enforcement of these guidelines will be done by the pupils, the teachers, the administrators, civil society, government officials, parents and wards. All further changes to these guidelines will be communicated by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and the National COVID-19 Emergency Response Center.

References

CDC: [Operating schools during COVID-19: CDC's Considerations](#)

American Association of Pediatricians: [COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry](#)

[Considerations for K-12 Schools: Readiness and Planning Tool](#)

[Guidance for full opening: schools - GOV.UK](#)

United Nations: [Framework for reopening schools](#)

WHO/UNICEF/UNESCO: [New guidance on considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19 -14 September 2020](#)

