



Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health
Requirements for the Resumption of Face to Face Instruction on the Islands of New
Providence, Abaco, Eleuthera and Exuma

This document has been prepared by the Ministry of Education to address the return to face-to-face instruction in all government-operated pre-primary, primary and secondary schools on the islands of New Providence, Abaco, Eleuthera and Exuma commencing February, 2021. The health and safety components of this document complement the information provided in the Ministry of Education's "*Strategic Plan for the Safe Reopening of Schools 2020*" and both are endorsed by the Ministry of Health in compliance with COVID-19 health and safety protocols. In addition, Appendix I contains criteria to determine how to characterize individuals who have public facing jobs as being at a higher-risk for poor outcomes if infected with the COVID-19 virus.

I. Prior to Resumption of Face-to-Face Instruction

1. Each school will develop its own implementation plans based on the prescription laid out in the "*Strategic Plan for the Reopening of School 2020*".
2. Ancillary and custodial staff will be trained by DEHS in effective disinfection, sanitization and high-cleaning.
3. Responsible officers will ensure that supply chains observe cleaning and sanitization procedures.
4. Contact information of campus health monitoring teams will be shared with the Ministry of Health.
5. School administrators will ensure that all individuals will be spaced at least 3ft apart, or a distribution of a minimum of 1 student per 7-12 square feet of occupied surface area in a classroom. It is not considered necessary to install plexiglass or any other such barrier on the desks of teachers or students.
6. Every school will have an uninterrupted supply of cleaning and sanitization supplies.
7. All windows will be operational to facilitate the free movement of fresh air into the classroom.
8. Administrators will take steps to ensure that there are sufficient personnel to effect cleaning recommendations.
9. Parents and guardians will be advised of the symptoms of COVID-19 and will be required to keep children at home who exhibit any such symptoms.

II. During face-to-face instruction

1. All individuals entering the campus shall adhere to all standard COVID-19 health and safety protocols including:
 - a. Wearing facemasks that properly cover both nose and mouth
 - b. Maintaining the prescribed social distances
 - c. Sanitizing hands frequently using soap and water or hand sanitizer with a minimum 70% alcohol content.
 - d. Following all instructions given by authorized personnel regarding the adherence to the maintenance of the school's protocols.Failure to comply fully with any of the above will lead to the individual being asked to leave the premises and appropriate sanctions being imposed.
2. All measures advanced by the Early Childhood and Daycare Council are supported.
3. Face –to-Face (FtF) instructions on aforementioned schools will commence February 2021 with not more than fifty percent of the enrolled student population on the school campus at once.
4. Food assistance will be provided to as many students demonstrating such need, as resources permit.
5. Isolation areas will be identified clearly, appropriately equipped with all members of the school community being made full aware of their locations.
6. Each school on New Providence will have an assigned School Health Nurse assigned beginning February 2021. For schools on the Family Islands, arrangements will be made with the health practitioners posted at the nearest government clinic.
7. Bus transportation contractors will take appropriate measures to mitigate the spread of infections among students including the following:
 - a. mandatory wearing of masks;
 - b. opened windows;
 - c. spacing of passengers 3 feet apart, if they are not members of the same household;
 - d. sanitization of bus after transporting each group of students; and
 - e. maintenance of a daily log with names of students on bus rides longer than 30 minutes.
8. Psycho-Social support for all students and staff will be provided as needed. Guidance counselors will serve as the first point of contact at the school. If additional support is required, guidance counselors will make the necessary arrangements.
9. The spread of COVID-19 will be minimized by having teachers move from classroom to classroom as much as possible as opposed to students moving from classroom to classroom.
10. Students are to be empowered to become influencers and monitors of common areas where congregation may occur.
11. Schools will employ staggered drop-off times and disparate zones to reduce the size of groups of students that come into contact with each other.
12. There will be constant monitoring of the adherence to health and safety protocols, including the wearing of masks by students, especially those at the pre-primary and primary levels.

III. Ongoing Monitoring & Evaluation Indicators

These parameters may be examined at any point in time during the school year when face-to-face schooling has resumed. The principal shall:

1. establish clear reporting lines for staff and students who are tested for COVID-19
2. identify individuals who can liaise with teachers/ staff / parents, within 24 -48 hours of concerns of a positive case in the school being expressed, to speak about contact tracing processes, answer any concerns they may have and to allay any fears.
3. create an electronic logbook of names of individuals that may become symptomatic, with an agreed schedule for sharing same with the Ministry of Health.
4. liaise with the Surveillance Unit for isolation, quarantine and assessment measures before issuing instructions to staff and students.
5. require teachers to maintain a list of children that usually play together or congregate to aid in contact tracing.

Remote Work Policy

The Department of Education issued a circular dated 1st October, 2020 which outlines its policy regarding this matter. Given the Prime Minister's directive that all public officers return to work and the Department of Education's efforts to resume face-to-face instruction in all of its schools, only those staff with extenuating circumstances will be permitted to work remotely. While the decision to determine individuals working remotely resides in the authority of the supervisor, the key factors to be considered in making such determination include:

1. The ability of the officer to work remotely
2. The "on the ground needs" of the organization; and
3. The severity of the circumstances underlying the request to work remotely.

Because students will be on the school campus, will be required to carry out their duties at school, unless otherwise excused by the Principal. This is necessary to further the "conviction that educators, parents, students, young adults and the wider community must share with the government the responsibility for the success of the educational enterprise", after having to deploy less than optimal methods to educate our children. Exceptions to the requirement for Staff to be physically in the classroom or at school will only be made for staff who produces well-documented medical conditions that place them at extreme risk of contracting covid-19 and its potential complications. (See Appendix I).

Requests by staff members wishing to work remotely in order to provide daycare services to a relative will not be accommodated. Accordingly, staff are expected to make necessary daycare arrangements for their child/children or relatives independent of the workplace.

Physical Plant Matters

Generally, schools in New Providence, Abaco, Eleuthera and Exuma are able to facilitate Face-to-Face instruction. Where major repairs are being undertaken, appropriate arrangements will be made to ensure that students and staff are safe. In a few instances, school re-opening for face-to-face instruction will be delayed.

Internet access

Arrangements have been made to ensure that all schools in New Providence have reliable internet access. Issues related to a bandwidth capacity on the school campus will be addressed.

Daily operation of schools during Face-to-Face Instruction

Because the Ministry of Health has mandated that schools on the listed islands accommodate not more than 50 percent of its enrolment on the campus at any one time, most schools will have to engage a hybrid modality of instruction. Each school will develop its plan for how students will be accommodated, and this information will be shared with parents and students so that they can act accordingly.

Appendix I

Pre-Existing Health Conditions and Circumstances that Will be Considered Acceptable for Remote Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 is a new disease and there is limited information regarding risk factors for severe disease. Based on currently available information and clinical expertise, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. For purposes in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are:

1. People aged 65 years and older
2. People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including those with:
 - a. chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma, cystic fibrosis, COPD, emphysema or bronchitis;
 - b. diabetes with complications such as limb amputation, kidney disease, vision problems, heart disease, history of stroke, or, especially if they have uncontrolled diabetes or other complications
 - c. heart disease such as heart failure or serious heart conditions
 - d. compromised immune systems including
 - a. outpatients currently receiving cancer treatment,
 - b. recipients of bone marrow or organ transplantation,
 - c. individuals with significant immune deficiencies,
 - d. individuals with poorly controlled HIV or AIDS,
 - e. those with prolonged use of corticosteroids and
 - f. those on other immune weakening medications
 - e. chronic kidney disease whether or not they are undergoing dialysis
 - f. liver disease such as hepatitis and cirrhosis, among others
 - g. severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
 - h. neurological conditions that weaken ability to cough such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), and other disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle including cerebral palsy, epilepsy [seizure disorders], stroke, intellectual disability, moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury
 - i. compromised spleen (for example, sickle cell disease) or if the spleen has been removed
 - j. a transplanted organ
 - k. rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, and homozygous sickle cell).

22nd February, 2021