



Safe School Reopening

Guidance- Field Teams



Save the Children
منظمة إنقاذ الطفل



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Introduction



COVID-19 in Iraq has influenced the education continuation, with different actors and respective Ministries (Federal Iraq and KRG) resorting to remote approaches to education continuation throughout the country. During the school closure, MoEs announced schools re-opening but the risk associated with spread of the disease, delayed the decision-making. However, MoE did reopen the schools but for only specific grades; whereas for Federal Iraq, one day/ week policy was implemented. Save the Children, also followed safety and school re-opening protocols set forth by MoEs. This guidance document is a tool for programme teams to plan and implement safe school reopening plan. This guidance is a live document and will be modified and adapted to fit the SoPs set forth by MoEs. The guidance has following sub-sections to help field teams understand the process of school re-opening.

- a. Phases of school reopening
- b. Key principles
- c. Monitoring and school reopening feedback mechanism
- d. Coordination with MoE at all levels, local communities

A. Key Principles

Save the Children's efforts for safe school re-opening will adhere to the following principles below to ensure school reopening is informed by core principles, critical to support safe, inclusive and equitable school reopening.

a. Integrated approach: COVID-19 has had multi-faceted impact on the children and their rights. It is critical for school re-opening to ensure, children get access to services such as child protection (referrals, support through PSS and MHPSS interventions), WaSH (disease preventative messaging, access to hand washing facilities, safe sanitation); health (sensitization and awareness on COVID-19 in age appropriate and child friendly methods, information on access to health facilities, tips and guidance for parents in case a child is sick etc.). Save the Children, safe school reopening will ensure integration to make schools safer for learners.

b. Child and Youth Participation: Children are not only ultimate beneficiaries but they are also change agents. School closure had been a process, which affected children and youth the most, their routines disrupted. They have been impacted by the rumors and misinformation on COVID-19. Engaging them in the communication process at the one- on -one level, and sensitization of school communities and dissemination of accurate information would be a crucial step for safe school reopening process.

c. Gender, Inclusion, and accessibility: Children face many barriers and challenges. COVID-19 has further exacerbated some of these challenges. The challenges could be different for boys and girls, children with different migratory/socio-economic status as well as children living with disabilities. Save the Children will follow safe school reopening guidelines to ensure inclusion, equity, and accessibility through its efforts, especially through targeted advocacy efforts at all levels namely at school community level, DoEs (at sub-national level), MoE (at the national and regional level).

d. Whole School Community: Schools are at the center of the community, hence it is important for school community to be engaged in the process of re-opening, to ensure their fears and misconceptions are addressed and most importantly, parents/caregivers, teachers, head-teachers etc. feel safe and included in the process which impacts them directly. Save the Children programme teams will work with school leadership, teachers and parents/caregivers to finalize various stages of school reopening plans. This is also to support buy-in from local communities.

e. Build on Existing Structures: Save the Children programme teams will build on the existing systems to disseminate accurate information, gather community support behind schools reopening efforts. These existing structures could be school management committees (their involvement in absence monitoring, communications with parents etc.), teacher learning circles (information and learning exchange on classroom management, integration of PSS in teaching activities post school reopening), children clubs (if they exist in schools, could be used to sensitize children, engage in discussion on their needs, resilience activities etc.)

f. Build Back Resilient: by involving school communities and local authorities, Save the Children also contributes towards capacity strengthening of the school communities e.g. resilience to manage such situations in future and apply local solutions. COVID-19 lessons and best practices will provide that knowledge base for these communities in future to prepare for school reopening if any external factor disrupts education e.g. any natural or health emergency

As per Global Education Cluster (GEC) and Education Cluster Iraq's guidance, school reopening has been planned in two phases namely, before schools reopen, and after school reopening. All phases will have dedicated actions for programme teams to implement. Below are the details of the guidance.

Before School Reopen

Before school reopen, programme teams should complete the following steps

- I. Organize internal meeting and identify budget lines that could be used for pre-school opening activities i.e. procurement (WaSH NFIs, PPE etc.)
- II. Understand and orient field teams on MoE and MoH protocols to ensure alignment with SoPs
- III. Conduct a quick assessment of teacher availability, resources needed to support safe school reopening per school, physical distance plans,
- IV. Organize focus group discussions with children/adolescent to understand their expectations, fears and apprehensions
- V. Consult with school authorities e.g. head teachers, teachers, PTA members on the school



For head teacher, teacher and school management committee

- Work with teachers/PTAs and prepare a social distancing plan with focus on social distancing in classrooms, common areas such as playground, lunch breaks, morning assembly, start and entry-times in school
- Discuss potential solutions for class sizing with head teachers and teachers; if MoE protocols include half attendance in a schools, prepare 1-2 social distancing approaches/models to be implemented i.e. sitting 2 meters apart
- Agree on the routine cleaning and disinfection frequency with school leadership, such as frequently touched surfaces i.e. desks, door knobs/handles, including maintenance and cleaning of toilets
- Conduct awareness for teachers on the need for regular classroom ventilation for improved air flow and potential health risks
- Ensure students have adequate supplies i.e. pens and pencils and are not sharing the resources
- Design age appropriate and child friendly messages on safe school reopening dos and don'ts, hand washing, physical distancing, where possible involve students in designing messages
- Work with DoEs and agree on protocols to be followed in case an infection is reported either among children or staff (head teachers, SMCs, teachers).
- Non-discrimination and confidentiality to be critical element of dealing with infections at school

Plan for a child friendly feedback model, this could be a feedback boxes in schools, or bi-monthly random discussions with the children to get feedback from the communities where we work. Recommended approach is blended, we can use mood meters or encourage children to write and drop their feedback in the boxes.

For Technical, Communication and advocacy Staff:

- Design age appropriate and child friendly messages on safe school reopening dos and don'ts, hand washing, physical distancing, where possible involve students in designing messages
- Organize back to school, and safe school reopening sensitization at the community level
- Work with Technical Specialist (Education), advocacy and communications team to draft and agree on messages for different age groups and audiences e.g. learners of all/targeted ages, children with disabilities, adults (this could include community elder, religious leaders, parents/caregivers), teachers and head teachers. The messages also need to target following sub-thematic
 - o MH/PSS >> children will be returning to schools after a long gap, their routines have been disrupted for almost close to a year. Therefore, it is important to think of mindfulness activities (MHPSS focal point to support with messages)
 - o Handwashing >> schools reopening could be challenging to manage, as children do interact and could potentially increase the risk of community transmission. Work with WaSH Technical Specialist or use the existing messages to be printed and put up at visible points in schools
 - o Gender: COVID-19 would have affected different age groups differently; this includes both boys and girls. As per information from different sources, school closure has resulted in higher child labor, sexual violence/GBV, early and forced marriages. The messages will have to target both girls and boys in terms of returning to school.
 - o CP >> messaging on child protection, referrals and available services are known to the school community
 - o Health >> set up referral mechanisms so that children, teachers and learners are aware of the nearest services

All communication and messaging needs to be in

- Child friendly
- Age appropriate
- Locally used/spoken language
- Communicated using different mediums i.e. radio, print, television, digital/social media

After School Reopen

After schools reopen, Programme teams to complete following

- i. Prioritize PSSS activities as part of school reopening and adjustment to the routine. School closure has disrupted the routine of the learners, ensure a transition plan is used for first 1-2 days in schools
- ii. Orient teachers on PSS/SEL activities
- iii. Monitor the situation and provide regular updates to DoE, cluster at sub-national level and CO\
- iv. Ensure remote learning methods are not completely dis-continued, so that in case of change in the context, school can adopt blended model again
- v. Develop emergency actions in consultation with head teacher/s and DoE in case a school/ classroom has a positive case of COVID-19, this should include guidance on immediate actions (see annex A)
- vi. Document lessons/challenges and share with CO for immediate remedial actions (Edu TS)
- vii. Ensure community mobilization efforts continue as rumors often lead to parent's reluctance to send their children to school

For head teacher, teacher and school management committee

- i. Ensure teachers include PSS and SEL activities in their daily lessons
- ii. Establish physical exercise routine as a daily practice, head teacher to nominate a focal point to engage learners
- iii. School teachers, PTAs to establish attendance/absence tracking system.
- iv. Plan catch up or remedial classes for learners who were not able to follow along through on-line classes
- v. Restart teacher learning circles/peer groups to support teacher learning as well as well-being
- vi. Deliver age- appropriate, gender sensitive, inclusive messages for children on psychosocial well-being, wellness, stress prevention
- vii. Encourage children, teachers and parents/caregivers to continue wellness activities at home,
- viii. Make a list of the learners who could not access remote/on-line learning platform to ensure a plan is put in place in to support them, in case of school closure
- ix. Establish attendance monitoring system, divide school population into cohorts, appoint focal point for each cohort, establish WhatsApp attendance/absence monitoring groups to support school leadership

Coordination:

Coordination at all levels is critical for the process of safe schools reopening. Programme teams to coordinate implementation of guidance under safe schools reopening with Education cluster at national and sub-national level, DoEs, and most importantly to CO so that national/regional level MoE is also updated on the progress made on school reopening, any lessons or challenges or best practices.

Annexes

Annex A- Guidance on immediate actions

Guidance on immediate actions in case a school reports positive COVID-19 case

Programme team and head teacher could follow this guidance,

- If a teacher or a student show any symptoms like flu or cough, ask the person to not come to school (follow this is a preventive/mitigation measure)
- Inform local health center or service provider. Update SC on the case and measures taken
- Immediately put in action school/classroom disinfection
- Make list of the people they might have contacted and ask them to stay at home for 3-5 days and continue remote learning/teaching
- Ensure field teams have clear guidance from DoE in case more than 1-2 learners/teachers report symptoms similar to flu/cold and cough. This guidance will also help to take any decision around school closure and subsequent communication to parents/school communities.

Annex B – Advocacy/Communications plan

Activity	Timeline	Medium	Responsible Team
Translation of Safe School reopening framework in Kurdish and Arabic	Feb 9-11, 2021	n/a	Education/advocacy & communications
Launch SC Safe School reopening framework	Feb 14-15, 2021	Work place, social media handles, website	Advocacy and Communications teams
Adapt messaging for activities at school and wider community awareness (refer to the pg 4) and for all age groups	Feb 15-24, 2021	Print, electronic and digital	Relevant TS (Education, CP, WaSH, MHPSS Manager)
Joint advocacy with MoEs (Federal and KRG) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint messaging (contextualized, age appropriate, child-friendly) - Sub-national level planning with DoEs 	Feb onwards	Print, electronic and digital	Education/advocacy & communications
Community level Campaigns on safe school reopening	Feb -March	Print, electronic and digital	Advocacy and Communications teams
Document Safe school reopening (testimonials, video snippets of children, head teachers, teachers, parents/caregivers, DoEs)	March- April, 2021	Work place, social media handles, website	Advocacy and Communications teams
Lessons learned and best practices documentation	April-May	Work place, social media handles, website	Edu TS, Advocacy and Communications teams
Monthly Dashboard	Feb onwards	Work place, social media handles, website	Edu TS, Advocacy and Communications teams



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