



Reopening Residential Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Version 1.0
June 3, 2020



Reopening Residential Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Version 1.0 | June 3, 2020

As residential schools start reopening, the safety of children must be balanced with their learning needs. This document outlines the steps state governments, departments and schools must take to ensure this.

This document should preferably be read with the document 'Schools in the Times of COVID-19. What Matters Most and What We Should Do', which has recommendations related to school processes, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, teacher support and mitigating the impact of COVID-19.

It must be noted that residential schools are extremely demanding even in usual circumstances, with young children separated from their parents often suffering from homesickness, falling ill often, undergoing stress and anxiety due to their physical and emotional development, and so on. Under the current circumstances, ensuring not only the physical but also emotional health of children will place a very high demand on the principal, teachers, wardens and other staff of the residential school. Therefore, the adult members of the school must be duly oriented and prepared.

1. Developing Policy and Protocols Related to Safety

- a. A safety policy for residential schools must be developed at the State level jointly by the relevant departments. This policy must outline mandatory screening protocols for entry into the school, mandatory daily screening of staff and students, mandatory physical distancing, mandatory protocols for meal safety, mandatory safety protocol for use of washbasins, toilets and bathrooms, sanitization protocols for classrooms and dormitories, and so on.
- b. Based on this policy, the State Health Department must develop safety protocols and guidelines for schools (e.g. use of foot operated hand wash stands; physical distancing in dormitories, classrooms and messes; use of masks/face visors; non-contact sports; use of alternate washbasins, toilets and bathrooms by students; use of slippers and of masks in the toilet; spraying of toilet walls and door handles with soap water after use; wiping down taps and washbasins with soap water after each use; sanitization of school premises; etc).
- c. It is expected that the Health Department will work collaboratively with the relevant departments to support implementation of the protocols and guidelines.
- d. Budgets must be revised to enable adherence to safety protocols, and to cater for additional expenses in school processes. A special budget should be allocated for purchase of equipment for non-contact sports like badminton, athletics, etc and radios/ CD players.

2. Standard Operating Procedures for Schools and a Reworked Daily Routine

- a. Based on the protocols and guidelines, the principal, teachers and staff of each school must develop Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs); each person in the school, including students, must take responsibility for adherence to these SoPs.
- b. In case any person associated with the school displays any symptoms of COVID-19 infection, the SoP must clearly indicate the person/office(s) these symptoms are to be reported to, and the steps for isolation of the individual.
- c. A clearly demarcated and prepared space must be kept in readiness for isolating the individual, with due care of their comfort and the safety of the care-giver(s); this space must be maintained on a daily basis.
- d. Similarly, a space for quarantining suspect or recovering cases must be identified and prepared; this space must be maintained on a daily basis.
- e. Preferably, each school should have an infirmary.
- f. Clear SoP related to use of masks is also necessary – e.g. it is not practical to mandate the use of masks for the entire day, particularly while running and playing. The use of visors could also be explored.
- g. Once the SoP is ready, the daily routine for students, teachers, wardens and other staff will have to be reworked in detail to factor in safety protocols.

3. Schools to Reopen in Phases

- a. Only 50% of the strength should return to school in the first phase (August to December) – priority must be given to secondary and senior secondary school students.
- b. In the first phase, for upper primary school students, print materials must be made available and posted to their homes with clear instructions on use, along with pre-stamped envelopes for returning assignments through postal services. Use of community radio should be preferred over smartphones for educational communication with these children; the Education and Social Welfare Departments can collaborate to prepare programmes.
- c. In the next phase (January to May), upper primary school students should return to schools.
- d. In case it is possible in view of safety protocols, students of classes 10 and 12 should remain in school and continue to prepare for their Board examinations. Students of classes 9 and 11 should return home.
- e. In the second phase, sufficient materials must be provided for secondary and senior secondary students who are at home; communication must be maintained through pre-scheduled Conference Calls on phone and assignments submitted through postal services.
- f. All learning material that is available on Doordarshan, radio and You Tube run by SCERT for other children of the State should be available for all students of residential schools; teachers could ensure that students and their parents are aware of this option.
- g. During the phase that students are at home, schools could explore the possibility of helping those who live close to each other form learning groups.
 - i. These learning groups could use all media available to them to – television, radio, You Tube, physical material – to discuss and learn.

- ii. Regular phone calls from teachers could be calendarized and taken by the groups (e.g on speaker phone).
- h. Teachers should be assigned the responsibility of catering to the learning needs of students who are not physically present in schools on rotation during each of the phases.

4. Staggered Admission/Return of Students to Establish a Culture of Care

- a. All students should not be asked to return at the same time. Days of return should be staggered both for classes and students from a single class.
- b. This is to allow adherence to the 'new' routine to become a habit with a smaller set of students, who can then mentor the next batch of the students into the routine. Thus, although the number of students will increase, the burden of ensuring adherence to the routine will be shared.
- c. To illustrate, students from classes 9-12 can be asked to return over a period of two weeks as below:
 - i. Students of class 12 can be asked to report over Saturday and Sunday of Week 1.
 - ii. By Monday of Week 1, they should start settling into the routine developed by the school.
 - iii. On Wednesday of Week 1, the routine should be reviewed, and any necessary changes made.
 - iv. By Friday of Week 1, student committees should be set up to mentor other students into the routine.
 - v. Students of class 11 should report over Saturday of Week 1 and Sunday of Week 2, and should be inducted into the routine by their peers with support from teachers and wardens.
 - vi. Students from class 10 should join on Wednesday and Thursday of Week 2, and students from class 9 on Saturday and Sunday of Week 2.
 - vii. The student committees can be expanded as more and more students join.
 - viii. Thus, a 'culture of care' will be established in the school as adherence to the routine becomes a habit.
- d. In case students of classes 10 and 12 have stayed back in schools in preparation for their Board examinations, they can help the returning upper primary school students into settling into the new routine.

5. Mandatory Screening Before Entry Into School Followed by Daily Screening

- a. Mandatory screening protocols must be followed for students, teachers, cooks, helpers, wardens, security staff, cleaning staff, and anyone else who is connected with the school in any way (including any vendors who deliver milk, bread, fruits, vegetables, etc directly to the school).
- b. This screening protocol must be developed in detail by the Health Department, and be carried out by medical professionals.
- c. Daily screening must be done based on protocols developed by the Health Department by the principal, teachers and wardens.
- d. There must be no compromise on these protocols – a sense of urgency must be maintained at all times.

- e. Daily sanitization protocols (washing hands, face, etc) must be followed by all members of the school.

6. Create a Closed Community Within the School

- a. Aarogya Setu app and updating status as per the app must be mandatory for all personnel as well as visitors with smartphones. Detailed records of visitors must be maintained at entry and exit.
- b. Contact of students, teachers and other staff with outsiders must be minimized. No visitors must be allowed, with the exception of parents on pre-arranged days; parents' visits must be prescheduled and restricted to ensure no overcrowding. A separate room must be assigned for visitors.
- c. Any person from outside the school must be treated with due caution, and enhanced safety precautions implemented (e.g. distance of 12 feet, use of masks, sanitization of hands, no materials to be accepted, etc).
- d. As many teachers as possible should remain on campus; arrangements must be made for teachers who can stay within the school premises with their families (they could be accommodated within the hostel premises).
- e. Teachers coming in from outside the school must undergo daily screening and adhere strictly to safety protocols. They could use face visors instead of masks since it may be difficult for them to teach for long hours with a mask. A separate space for use as a staff room must be made available to them.
- f. The kitchen staff must be kept separate from the students, since they would be going out for shopping, etc. As far as possible, identified vendors should deliver the requirements so the visits of the kitchen staff to markets are minimized. These identified vendors should be given identity cards, which they must wear at all times.
- g. Student committees can be organized for serving the food to their peers.
- h. Assuming the schools can become a closed community, for the initial 14 days, strict rules as per quarantine must be observed, following which the community within the school can be like a family, with due adherence to protocols for safety.

7. Physical Distancing Norms in Classrooms, Messes and Dormitories

- a. Strict physical distance needs to be maintained in classrooms, messes and dormitories, with clearly demarcated areas/furniture/cubicles for use and those which are to not to be used to ensure minimum required separation between individuals.
- b. Since only 50% of teachers will be on campus, classes could be held in two shifts – this would also reduce overcrowding in dormitories in the daytime.
- c. As far as possible, classes could be held in the open.
- d. Measures such as staggered timings for meals, circles to indicate space for standing in queue and for eating, etc can also be used.
- e. With 50% occupancy due to reduced strength, dormitories must be allocated keeping in mind aspects such as size of rooms, number of toilets and bathrooms to be shared, etc.
- f. Until a culture of care sets in, teachers and wardens may take turns to sleep in the student dormitories; the responsibility for ensuring adherence to protocols can then be handed over to student committees.

8. Ensuring Safety in Preparation of Meals

- a. The cook and helpers must meet the principal every day (after the daily screening before they go to the kitchen) for physical inspection based on protocols developed by the Health Department.
- b. SoP for preparation and cleaning of food material, cooking, serving, and washing of utensils must be developed in keeping with guidelines of the Health Department, and strictly adhered to.
- c. Apron, head covering, gloves, visors (if possible), etc must be made available.

9. Sensitization of All Members of the School

- a. All members of the school must be educated about COVID-19 and made aware of safety protocols.
- b. Under the guidance of teachers, students must prepare and place posters around the school as visual reminders of safety protocols.
- c. Students must be empowered by given responsibility for maintaining safety protocols on a rotation basis.

10. Stress-Free and Fear-Free Environment

- a. Mandatory safety protocols, physical distancing and separation from families may create anxiety and fear among students.
- b. It is up to the principal, teachers, warden and other staff to assuage the fears of students and help them take a pragmatic approach to the situation.
- c. Daily morning assembly must be used to give students information and to encourage them to raise questions.
- d. The Health Department may record experts speaking about a variety of topics related to health and safety, which can be viewed by students.
- e. Entertaining films, non-contact sports, reading groups, dance sessions, singing, musical evenings using the radio, etc should be built into the daily calendar to keep the spirits of students, teachers, wardens and other staff high.
- f. Teachers may also undergo stress and anxiety, particularly if they are separated from their families. A counsellor should be available for both students and teachers for tele-consultation.

