

Education respond strategy to COVID-19: Key Messages

During this critical and unprecedented situation that warranted the closure of all schools including Madrassahs, Daras, Majalis and Non-Formal Education in the Gambia, it is important to situate and clarify the roles and responsibilities of key education stakeholders. This is also a critical moment to have a unified and uniform messaging to dispel rumours and misinterpretations particularly issues related to education.

The closure also affects nonconventional learning settings that brings more than 10 people together in order to enforce the health directives for social distancing.

a) Why schools are closed?

This is a public health preventive measure that aims to protect students and teachers from any risk of contracting and transmitting the COVID 19. In the Gambia, on average, a teacher interacts with 45 students daily. As the virus is highly contagious, a teacher or a student could potentially infect 45 households of a minimum of 7 household members (1:45x7:315). Therefore, the closure of schools is an education in emergency situation responding to this crisis.

At the end of the crisis, the Ministry of Education through the Regional Education Directorates and school administrators will initiate measures to make-up for the learning gaps due to the school closure.

In view of this, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education is designing measures to mitigate the spread of the virus and keep students, teachers and parents safe. The alternative learning opportunities provided by the Ministry include:

- The development and provision of distance learning materials
- The use of TV and radio as medium to dispense learning
- The use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, ... to facilitate interaction between teachers, students, school administrators and parents
- The use of experience teachers for development and delivery of distance learning lessons

b) Role of parents

The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education is aware that parents are worried about the consequences that relate to the closure of schools. This is indeed a stressful time for families. Parents and caregivers are encouraged not to leave the children on their own and make sure that they are not exposed to large crowd. This pandemic is real! Your own judgment on how to support your child is before you to decide but one needs to rely on the official channels of communication provided by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education.

Parents should ensure and encourage children to actively participate in at least one of the learning platforms provided for by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary education.

- a) **Education and Radio TV Programmes:** parents should ensure that children have access and are around the TV or Radio during the educational programmes. Parents should take this opportunity to support and monitor their children during this programmes.
- b) **Distance Learning Materials:** Parents are encouraged to get in touch with the Regional Education Directorates and Head of Schools to have access to reading and learning resources.
- c) **Social Media:** Parents are advised to ensure their children use the social media that is authorized by the Ministry and their Head Teachers. It is important that parents facilitate easy access and monitor these platforms

- d) **Feedback:** Parents are encouraged to provide feedbacks to the Ministry for possible improvement of the learning content, platform usage and other related opportunities and challenges.

For Examination classes, parents do not need to worry. Everything is being done to ensure that G9 and G12 students are not disadvantaged!

c) Role of Teachers

The success of this initiative of providing alternative learning opportunities heavily relies on the total commitment and involvement of teachers. Also, it is important for teachers to note that they are not on holidays. However, teachers are encouraged to strictly follow all the safety measures prescribed by the relevant and authorized health institutions and personnel.

Teaching and learning can still continue; therefore, teachers are expected to:

- a) Participate and support student learning via the different platforms provided for by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. Teachers are encouraged to give work, assignments and respond to students' questions.
- b) Monitor the radio and TV programmes and equally give feedbacks for possible improvement
- c) Participate in content development and share good practices through the authorized social media and audio-visual platforms
- d) Get in touch with their Schools, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education and the Regional Education Directorates to access the distance learning resources compiled for this purpose. In the event that any school come up with a distance learning initiative such as WhatsApp group, Chats etc..., it is mandatory for teachers to be involved in whatever form expected by the school.
- e) Fully participate in the awareness raising and information sharing that are accurate and science-based about COVID-19. Information from the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and WHO are the only ones that should be shared with students and parents.