Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic poses an enormous risk to the health and safety of learners, teachers, parents, school administrators, education practitioners, and the wider community. More than 1.5 billion children and young people globally have been affected by school closure. In Nigeria, the COVID-19 pandemic closure has deprived over 80 million learners access to quality education. However, the early closure of schools has safeguarded more lives of learners, teachers, education personnel and the wider community.

This document has been developed as a collaborative initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education, Education in Emergencies Working Group Nigeria (EiEWGN), Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), UNICEF, Save the Children International, Plan International, Street Child, Terre des Hommes, international development partners, donors, civil society members, education administrators, teachers' unions, parents, and community representatives across Nigeria.

The main purpose of these guidelines for the safe reopening of schools and learning facilities is to support government and relevant stakeholders to ensure safe reopening of schools, restore pre-pandemic capacities, and institutionalize good safe school practices for the transformation of the education sector in the long term. Additional guidance will be issued for Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCDE), schools with boarding/accommodation facilities, special needs, and on the use of educational facilities as shelters, treatment units and markets.

These guidelines are intended to address safe school reopening across the country while sustaining the gains of early school closure . There is no single established system for reopening schools and learning facilities in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this document provides a framework not only to ensure that schools meet a high compliance level before reopening but to ensure that we build back better resilience against future disasters and emergencies.

It is desirous that all private and public schools adhere to the control measures highlighted in this document on how to operate within this new context for the protection of learners, teachers, education personnel and their families. As COVID-19 response in Nigeria currently remains fluid, it is essential to note that these measures are subject to change according to updated guidance and new information regarding public health from the NCDC.

The Guidelines for Schools and Learning Facilities Reopening after COVID-19 Pandemic Closures covers four thematic areas:

1. Staying home and learning safely
2. Before schools and learning facilities reopen
3. Reopening Process
4. Conditions of safety when learning facilities are reopened

In each of these thematic areas, actions and responsibilities are identified for various stakeholders such as policy, financing, safe operations, learning, training, reaching the most marginalized, building back better, safety and hygiene, Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC).

1. STAYING HOME AND LEARNING SAFELY

Ensuring continuity of learning is vital. Staying home and learning in a safe environment does not only address learner's and educator's basic physical safety needs but also ensure that all learners and their families/household members are safe. This means that all education environments must be inclusive irrespective of location, access to the internet, and socio-economic background. The following actions are recommended to safeguard the health, safety, and security of learners accessing remote learning while ensuring that quality learning outcomes are obtainable :

- Conduct online training that not only prepares teachers to teach in a way that safeguards the health, safety, and security of the learners but also enables them to facilitate learning using 21st-century pedagogy based on ICT
- Revise to strengthen current remote learning programs initially launched for stronger curriculum backing towards improving relevance and quality on a grade level to level basis.
- Provide learners access to online resource materials, online learning platforms, radio, or TV programs
- Children and young people should stay at home and wash their hands regularly, maintain personal hygiene, and adhere to NCDC/WHO COVID-19 guidelines.

2. BEFORE SCHOOLS AND LEARNING FACILITIES REOPEN

Federal and State Ministries of Education (SMoE) should decide when to reopen schools after due consultations with the Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 (PTF) and other critical stakeholders taking into consideration key requirements listed in the guidelines. In each state, a functional Schol Health programme chaired by a state school health focus officer should be put in place while a school focal officer should be assigned in every school. Schools must also put in place systems that meet the following:

- Safe distancing procedures
- Alternative learning models for safe distancing. The guideline proffers diverse alternative learning models tailored to the specific learning context that assures equity in learning
- Review existing policies, practices, and risk mitigation strategies in the use of schools for other purposes, such as distance learning centers, temporary shelters, isolation, quarantine and treatment centers, markets, voting centers, and others.
- Develop and display at schools simple context-specific reference protocols on day to day actions to be operated in each school.
- Conduct risk assessment with a view to understanding the gaps in the system that can increase the risk of transmission and make recommendations for addressing the gaps
- Safety and hygiene in all stages and phases of the school reopening process which promote behaviors that reduce spread, such as school commutes (to and from school travelling), safe distancing, frequent hand washing, and the use of facemasks.

Other guiding framework includes sensitization, financing, learning, and monitoring procedures.

3. THE REOPENING PROCESS

Adjusting to the new school process requires much planning. A phased and gradual reopening of schools is advocated to minimize the risk of infections in schools and the resurgence of COVID-19 infections in the community. This involves measures including:

- Training of teachers and other personnel on safety and hygiene measures.
- Establishing a COVID-19 referral system.
- Ensure availability of an ambalance and access to a testing/isolation/treatment centre including NCDC helpline and state government facilities.
- Ensure adequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities across the school premises.
- De-congesting classrooms, hostels, worship centres and other spaces.
- Encouraging use of open spaces for gathering and promoting outdoor activities.
- Establish a staff/students committee for regular surveillance, monitoring and enforcement of COVID-19 guidelines.

4. ENSURING SAFETY WHEN SCHOOLS AND LEARNING FACILITIES REOPEN

Preventive actions are sustained through regular monitoring of compliance in schools after reopening to ensure the safety and health of all learners, teachers, administrators, and other education personnel. Each school will comply with periodic Joint Risk Assessment for Safe Reopening of Schools and Learning Facilities Checklist under **Annex A of the guidelines.**

Implementing these guidelines will require the collaborative support of all stakeholders to reopen schools and learning facilities. With the guidance offered in this document, schools should be able to put systems in place that allow them reopen in a way that protects learners, teachers, administrators, parents, and all stakeholders while providing high-quality education.

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