

RADIO EPISODE 11:

SCHOOLS REOPENING

There is some worry and confusion about schools reopening. For example, what safety measures should be in place? How will children make up for lost learning time? What about resuming school sports? Let's hear what the experts say.

RADIO:

Start with playing the 'COVID-19 – Together we can beat it' song.

Welcome to the 11th of our 'COVID-19 – Together we can beat it' radio programmes. Keep listening so that you know how to protect yourself, your family and friends against the many challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brings.

Feel free to ask questions and share your experience. Phone us on XXX, SMS us on XXX or send a WhatsApp message on XXX to be part of this conversation.

Over the last eight weeks, we have given you important information about the Coronavirus and COVID-19 disease, and have shared the five Golden Rules which will protect us if we follow them.

We've also looked at myths and misconceptions about COVID-19, and last week we cleared up some confusion about how to wear masks and washing our hands.

From this week on, we will discuss ways that will help us to cope with the disruption this pandemic has caused in our lives.

Around the world, governments closed schools to stop the spread of the virus, affecting hundreds of millions of children. Today, we will talk about the impact of school closures on children and discuss why and how our country is now reopening schools.

To answer your questions, we are joined by a representative of the Ministry of Education, XXX, as well as by panellists ...

Let us talk about it:

What has been the impact of school closures on children and why has the Ministry of Education decided that it is time to reopen schools? How is this being done? What are the challenges and how are schools coping with these? Are our children safe at school?

There have been many negative impacts of school closures on children:

- The obvious impact has been the huge loss of learning time this year.
- Research also shows that the longer schools remain closed, the more likely it is that vulnerable children will not return.
- There has been more sexual exploitation of children and youth; we have also seen an increase in early and unwanted pregnancies and early marriages.
- School closures cut children off from immunisation and school feeding.
- There has also been an increase in violence against girls and boys.
- And the increased pressures on children and youth, forced isolation and worries about their studies have created anxiety, stress and other psycho-social challenges.

These risks have also had a greater impact on children who are already vulnerable.

Schools provide a safety net, especially for vulnerable children, and it is therefore the right thing to open schools as soon as health specialists believe it is safe.

SECTIONS BELOW OPTIONAL – MoE AND OTHER EDUCATION SPECIALISTS CAN POSSIBLY GIVE THE INFORMATION:

Reopening schools brings a range of new challenges. These include:

- Making sure schools have the resources and capacity to keep learners and teachers safe.
- Schools must put clear protocols in place, and ensure that learners and teachers have access to water, sanitation and hygiene; as well as to masks and space to observe social distancing.
- The Ministry has to assess how much learning time was lost, and put in place measures to make this up.
- There must be guidelines for how assessment and promotion will work.
- Vulnerable learners and teachers must be protected.

Plans for reopening of schools in Malawi:

- Form 4 learners went back to school on 7 September and the rest (Form 1 – 3 and primary school learners) went back on 12 October 2020.
- Records show that a high number of female learners fell pregnant during the lockdown and dropped out of school.
- The schools' focus is now more on Curriculum catch-up programmes and exams.

(For more information, see the MoE Guidelines attached)

We are delighted to have a representative from the Ministry of Education with us today, to give us first-hand information and answer your questions. And we also want to hear from our youth panellist about the experience of youth and learners.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO THE PANEL:

To the MoE representative and any other education specialist:

- 1 Please tell us what you see as the challenges faced by learners and teachers during the lockdown.
- 2 Was the Ministry able to mitigate any of these challenges? And if you were, how did you do it?
- 3 I understand it must have been difficult to decide when and how to reopen schools. Please tell us what the MoE's thinking was.
- 4 Our listeners would also love to know more about what is happening now that schools are being reopened. What are the main challenges that the Ministry and schools are facing, and how are you coping with these?
- 5 What would you like our listeners to know about sending learners back to school responsibly?

To a youth facilitator (if on the panel)

- 1 As a young person, who has close contact with learners in schools, what do you want to share about the challenges that learners have faced and are still facing, and how they are coping?
- 2 Do you have any questions for our Ministry of Education specialist?

SMS TOPIC 12:

If you are like millions of other learners, being out of school for months has probably been tough. Going back to school can also be difficult. Believe in yourself and don't let this get you down. Be a leader and get help if you struggle. Contact your FLN youth facilitator. Make sure you Tune in to ZODIAK FM this Wednesday from 18.30 pm, to get answers from education specialists. To opt out send 'stop' to 884204673 (343 characters no spaces)