

# REOPENING SCHOOLS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

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BEST PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

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# INTRODUCTION

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- Zimbabwe experience its first Covid-19 case on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 and recorded the first Covid-19 related death on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020.
- This prompted the Zimbabwe government to take measures to curtail the spread of the pandemic
- One of the measures was the imminent closure of schools on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 to minimise the rate of transmission.
- While the government attempted to have schools re-open in July, the rise in local transmission meant that the plans were halted.
- Zimbabwe was perhaps one of a few if not the only country that successfully conduct public examination in June and July.
- This experience is now being applied to the new plans to re-open schools.

# PLANS FOR SCHOOLS RE-OPENING

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- Zimbabwe plans to re-open schools in a phased approach starting with those earmarked to write summative examinations in 2020 ( Grade 7, Form 4 and form 6) with other levels also joining in phases.
- Re-opening should comply to the World Health Organisation(WHO) guidelines...
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education(MoPSE) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Child Care(MoHCC) and the national Covid-19 task force has developed Standard Operating Procedures(SOP) to guide the operations of all schools under the covid-19 environment.

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- The SOPs have been distributed to all the schools in the country and are being used in the training of all personnel as schools prepare for re-opening.
  - The SOPs cover issues ranging from the establishment of a holding bay to ensuring recommended physical distancing marking within and without the classrooms.
  - A survey was conducted to find out whether or not the SOPs had reached to the intended beneficiaries and this survey revealed that all schools had received the important documents.
  - Training of teachers and other staff is ongoing across the country.
  - Each school is to have a trained School Health Coordinator.
  - Government is also prioritising the provision of Covid-19 essentials such as personal protective equipment(PPE)
  - Therefore infrared thermometers, hand sanitizers, WASH stations, disinfectants, masks and liquid soap are being provided by the government.

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- Each school is linked to a local health centre or team for ease of collaboration
  - The Ministry is procuring face masks from schools. These masks are being made by schools' Textile Technology departments under guidelines from the MOHCC.
  - Boreholes have and are being drilled at schools that normally have perennial water shortages.
  - As done during the June/July examinations all schools are under going disinfection and sanitization before they open their doors to learners.
  - The Ministry has established a dedicated Command Centre to coordinate all activities related to schools re-opening
  - There are also Command Centres for Provinces and Districts.
  - The Ministry has set up an online platform that assesses the level of preparedness for each school with the intension of identifying gaps and challenges and acting upon them.

# CHALLENGES

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- Shortage of learning space in some schools as schools follow the requirements for physical distancing.
- Shortage of teaching staff with increased classes and reduced teacher-pupil ratio.1:20
- Some learners have been accessing virtual lessons while others did not have access to these especially those in rural areas. Need for catch up programmes
- Financial challenges which might affect the payment of schools fees owing to the fact that some of the parents have been laid off from their jobs.