



Reference: COVID-19/20200917/01
Enquiries: BK Schreuder

TO: Principals and Teachers of all Public Schools

(For information: School Governing Bodies)
(For information: Independent Schools)

Dear Colleagues

AMENDED DIRECTIONS AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

On Tuesday 15 September 2020 the Department of Basic Education (DBE) issued an *Amendment of Directions* in terms of Regulation 4(3) of the Regulations made under the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act 57 of 2002), published in *Government Gazette* No. 43715 of 15 September 2020.

Subsequently, they also released a revised Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the management and containment of Covid-19 for schools and school communities.

Please see attached the two documents. I ask that your School Governing Body and School Management Team familiarise yourselves with the contents of both documents. While I cannot comment on every amendment or change in the SOP, I would like to highlight some significant points.

1. Physical distancing requirements

One of the most significant changes to the SOP is the physical distancing requirements. Both the Western Cape Education Department and DBE guidelines have previously stated a 1,5-metre distance between learners.

The revised SOP now indicates that schools should work on “the practicality of implementing physical distancing of only **one metre** in primary and secondary schools, per class.

This will allow for possible adjustments to the numbers of learners back at school on a particular day, as well as your classroom settings and/or your Temporary Revised Education Plans (TREPs).

2. Large school facilities

The amended directions allow for schools to operate in accordance with their traditional and daily timetable models (including all grades), if the school has a large enough facility to comply with the health, safety, and social distancing requirements to enable 1m physical distancing between learners in a class.

The amended directions also allow for schools to accommodate more than 50 learners in a facility for education purposes, provided that all health, safety and social distancing measures for Covid-19 are complied with. This will assist schools, especially during examination periods, when examinations are being conducted in large facilities such as school halls.

These directions do not allow for non-education activities. Schools or school halls may not be used for church services, funerals or any other public gatherings.

3. The wearing of masks

Section 13 of the revised SOP addresses the wearing of masks. Masks are to be worn by learners, teachers and non-teaching staff at all times on the school premises. Face shields/visors are not a replacement for face masks and can be used in conjunction with face masks.

The revised SOP encourages schools to allow learners and staff the opportunity to take a **“face mask break” (5-15 minutes)**, every two hours during the school day, when they can safely remove their masks outdoors and when a distance of at least **1,5 metres** from other people is maintained.

The revised SOP also provides guidance for learners, teachers and non-teaching staff in schools for the Deaf and the Blind, as well as for learners with intellectual or cognitive disabilities and who have a limited range of verbal communication.

4. Isolation and quarantine periods

The revised SOP indicates the number of days after which a staff member or learner can return to school after testing positive or being in direct or close contact with an individual with a confirmed Covid-19 diagnosis.

The SOP indicates that:

- Learners or staff members who have been in direct or close contact with a *confirmed* case of Covid-19 should be informed to quarantine for a period of **14 days**.
- Individuals with a *confirmed* Covid-19 diagnosis can stop isolation precautions and return to school after 10 days from the day their symptoms first started or **10 days** from testing positive.

- Alternatively, if admission to hospital is required for the treatment of Covid-19, they can return to school at least eight days from the date of discharge and when they are well enough to return to school.

Repeat testing for SARS-CoV-2 or a doctor's letter of fitness is NOT required before returning to school or work.

5. Decontamination

Section 17 of the revised SOP indicates that all equipment and rooms (classrooms and other indoor areas) that an individual with Covid-19 has been in contact with, during the **preceding three days**, should be identified and appropriately cleaned.

Should the period **exceed 72 hours**, then the appropriate cleaning and disinfecting should take place *by the school*. This includes mopping and wiping of surfaces with a detergent with at least 70% ethanol or sodium hypochlorite.

The revised SOP confirms our earlier stance on the fogging and spraying of staff and learners. Section 17(3) states the following, "This is not allowed as it is ineffective and harmful to people and the environment. Spraying outdoors is wasteful and is not proven to reduce the risk of Covid-19; it should not be done."

6. Learners with special education needs

The amended directions outline the process that needs to be followed when a learner with special education needs does not return to school due to underlying health concerns or a general concern over the risk of transmission of Covid-19.

Annexure E1 of the directions is an updated application for the exemption of a learner to attend school. Parents or caregivers of learners with special education needs are required to specify the support needs of the learner in respect of teaching and learning material, assistive devices and/or therapeutic services.

Parents and caregivers must ensure that any teaching and learning material and assistive devices are collected or accessed and returned as per arrangement with the school.

The revised SOP includes a section (section 8) on the *Key Considerations for Supporting Specific Learner Needs*. It is important that ALL schools are aware of the specific needs that learners may have and that these are provided for in whatever school setting the learner attends. These disabilities may include physical, intellectual, sensory and/or neurological disabilities.

There is also extensive input in section 24 of the revised SOP on the *Provision of Therapeutic Support* and in section 25 on the *Management of Assistive Devices*.

7. Hostels

School hostels have to comply with health, safety and physical distancing requirements.

Section 17 of the SOP provides greater detail on the management of Covid-19 in school hostels and dining rooms.

8. General

I would like to commend our schools for the efforts to manage TREPs over the past few weeks since all grades have returned to school. The system is stabilising, with almost no disruption. We have also seen a significant decrease in the number schools needing decontamination and of staff that have tested positive for Covid-19.

I again urge that schools ensure that all health and safety protocols are strictly adhered to at all times. Let us not become complacent. Covid-19 is still with us. Now is the time for us all to ensure that we do everything we can to ensure strict compliance so that we can contribute towards avoiding a possible second wave. Let us continue to wear masks, wash/sanitize hands and keep physical distance.

We have overcome so much in these past six months and we must remember and embrace those colleagues that have succumbed or lost a loved one. Please continue to protect yourselves and your loved ones as well as those around you.

Please help us to refocus on Learning in the time that we have left this year. Let us maintain the energy that we have displayed and ensure that teaching and learning continues.

Thank you for everyone's ongoing contribution. Let us continue to strive for towards attaining our vision of Quality Education for every child, in every classroom, in every school in the province.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely



BK SCHREUDER
HEAD: EDUCATION
DATE: 17 September 2020