Inaugural Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of Experts on Educational Institutions and COVID-19
June 30, 2020
DRAFT AGENDA

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<th>Time</th>
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| 13:00 – 13:20 | **Opening remarks:**
|          | Dr. Ibrahima Socé Fall, Assistant Director-General for Emergencies Response WHO
|          | Stefania Giannini, ADG Education, UNESCO
|          | Robert Jenkins, Chief, Education UNICEF                      | Inaugural function    |
| 13:20 – 13:35 | **Introductions and Declaration of Interest**               | Compliance             |
| 13:35 – 13:40 | **Overview of TORs and operational procedures:** Valentina Baltag, MCA | Discussion             |
| 13:40 - 13:55 | **COVID-19 and educational institutions: where we are and what we know?** Valentina Baltag, MCA on behalf of WHO, UNESCO and UNICEF | Information            |
| 13:55 - 14:30 | **Making TAG operational: thematic focus, ways of working:** Valentina Baltag, MCA | Discussion             |
|          | **Wrap up and closing:** Dr. Ibrahima Socé Fall             |                        |
BACKGROUND

The role of children in transmission of SARS-CoV-2 remains poorly understood. There is some evidence that children and young people play a lesser role in transmission of SARS-CoV-2 at a population level. Evidence for older children/adolescents is mixed but suggests that their epidemiology and role in transmission are closer to that of young adults than that of smaller children.

As part of the response to COVID-19, 163 countries have closed schools on varying schedules. So far more than a billion children have missed out on school. In many cases, school closures have meant that children lost access to school meals and other essential social elements necessary to overall well-being.

To address questions necessary to forging sound policies, the World Health Organization (WHO), UNESCO and UNICEF decided together to establish a technical advisory group (TAG) of experts on educational institutions and COVID-19.

The group has expertise in school health policies, school and adolescent health research, COVID-19 modelling for school transmission and epidemiology of COVID-19 in children.

The scope of the TAG’s work is to include:

- Epidemiology of the school transmission and modelling
- Research priorities
- Translating research findings into policy decisions
- Identifying lessons learned, key emerging issues and innovations
- Other topics as identified by TAG, WHO, UNESCO and UNICEF.

FIRST MEETING

On 30 June 2020, the first meeting of the WHO/UNESCO/UNICEF Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of Experts on Educational Institutions and COVID-19 took place via Zoom. The meeting was expected to achieve the following:

1. Establish the group
2. Validate the terms of reference
3. Discuss key focus and ways of working.

All of the above was achieved.

This first meeting was chaired by WHO. There will be a second meeting on 15 July 2020 and hosted by UNESCO. Subsequent meetings will be chaired on a rotating basis by UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO. Meetings will take place once monthly and be organized around a theme.

- Each meeting will have a topic, which may link to the organization serving as chair for that meeting (WHO, UNESCO or UNICEF). The topic of the 15 July meeting will be resilience.
- Things are moving so quickly, TAG members may wish to interact between meetings.
• The research group on educational institutions complements and links to this TAG but is a different kind of group. It is an open network on COVID-19 research and educational institutions, and anyone can be part of it. It is co-facilitated by WHO and UNESCO. It has two subgroups. The first is looking at issues related to transmission of the virus in educational institutions. The second subgroup will look at indirect effects on health, well-being and social impact. The plan is for a maximum of two key areas to be the focus: one on transmission (fleshing out the chain of transmission). The other subgroup on health and wellbeing had its first meeting on 30 June. TAG members who are also members of the research group are encouraged to give updates.

INITIAL REACTIONS FROM THE GROUP

• It will be important to consider the impact of closure of universities.

• Children with disabilities having special education needs, and those with chronic health conditions and the impact on them should also be studied.

• Teacher capacity, preparedness of school management and the role of parents with regard to school reopening must be considered.

• Boarding schools represent a special circumstance, and this needs to be considered.

• We should recognize the urgency of this work - many if not all countries are currently making plans on reopening and if this TAG is going to inform these processes, it will be important to share evidence and advice as soon as possible.

• School locations and mode of transport to schools may also have an impact on reopening.

• Evidence-informed policy may be an important terms to use given that what is happening now is unprecedented, and the full scope of evidence is not available.

• Nonformal education and vocational education settings should be considered.

• The impact on school nurses as the primary health care providers in the educational institutions should be included.

• What are the capacities for working within urgent timeframe. Also, how can we assist with data collection and surveillance.

• Need to focus on migrants and refugee children and youth.

• Perceptions of communities and parents and teachers should be gathered on school reopening and how to open.

• Schools, when re-opened, are not the same as they used to be. What is impact on educational outcomes and well-being of children when they must wear masks, keep their distance and not play together. Will this affect the willingness of children to go to school?
Suggest priorities are:

➢ One strategy might be seeing the biggest gaps where guidance has not been developed. What are the areas that have not been addressed?
➢ Consider how the guidance we can provide helps educational institutions become resilient in the event of COVID being extended or another pandemic. We need to future-proof educational systems for COVID or other infectious disease outbreaks and similar challenges.
➢ Applying an equity lens to all the guidance we provide will be critical.

AGREED PRINCIPLES

The group will focus on opening of educational institutions examined from a public health and safety mindset at the intersection of public health and education.

The three agreed areas of priority are:

1. Looking at resilience of schools
2. To see where there are gaps in terms of guidance needed, which can be done by WHO, UNESCO and UNICEF as a follow up to this meeting through regional and country networks.
3. Consideration of the most vulnerable linked to equity.