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Note for the Record – Third Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of Experts on Educational Institutions and COVID-19
Wednesday 19 August 2020 13:00-14:30 (CET)

Action points from the 2nd TAG meeting that took place on 15 July 2020:

1. Updates from guidance documents as presented during the 2nd TAG meeting
   ➢ Presented by Dr. Valentina Baltag, WHO, Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Ageing, WHO

   o The TAG was requested to share inputs into the UNESCO Resilience Framework. Comments by 24 August.
   o The work on Global Standards for Health Promoting Schools started before the start of COVID-19. It was agreed that elements related to school resilience to situations like COVID-19 will be embedded to strengthen the document. The release date is scheduled for April 2021.
   o WHO Annex Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19 is under revision. Comments from the TAG due August 24 for anticipated release of the updated Annex on September 1.
   o Request at the 2nd TAG meeting to share publications on COVID-19 mortality in teachers, school health personnel, the correlation between school reopening decisions and levels of community transmission. To date nothing was shared. TAG members were requested to share relevant publications with TAG secretariat and members.

   o Upcoming guidance on masks and children (released on 21 August),
   o The guide Practical actions to support school to open and establish contingency plans (working title) will include checklists for colleagues in the education sector (expected release September 2020)
   o UNESCO’ Resurgence planning chapter of the COVID-19 response toolkit expected in September 2020
   o UNICEF document on opening of preschools and kindergartens expected September 2020

2. Update from the Research Network on COVID-19 and Educational Institutions
   ➢ Presented by Dr. Russell Viner, Professor of Adolescent Health at the UCL Institute of Child Health in London

   o Professor Viner presented a draft document called “Understanding the chain of transmission of COVID-19 in children and young people”. The purpose of the document is to help scientists and policy makers understand the data there are, the chain of transmission, how to appraise data and how to look at what the gaps are. The audience is primarily public health scientists and policymakers.
   o Prof. Viner presented 3 sequential questions for thinking through the chain of transmission and understanding data and what data are useful for children: 1) do they catch it? If they catch it, how severely do they get it? 3) Do they pass it on?
   o The draft paper starts with key principles to consider for studies in children and key points that must be considered when reviewing data. This includes looking for evidence from a broad range of studies and not rushing to conclusions based on one particular study.
Representativeness is a key source of bias in many studies. Studies which recruit through testing or symptomatic cases will underestimate children – children are tested less because they tend to be less symptomatic. Seroprevalence studies underrepresent children and recruit those with long-term conditions and not others. There is a bias in contact tracing especially those who only test symptomatic – they miss those without symptoms.

For secondary exposure in educational/childcare settings, it is important to understand whether the settings were open or closed and we need to be slightly more careful about open because many of them were partially open. What was the mixing pattern in children, compared to adults at the time during lockdown? In some cases, adults were still going to work or traveling while children were not at school and mostly at home. Understanding this adds a level of complexity.

Children and adolescents should be studied separately because susceptibility and transmission in those younger than 12 is different to teenagers.

The context in which the study was done must also include the background levels of virus prevalence because studies that come from areas where virus prevalence were very low may tell different stories to where they are high.

In this product, the focus was largely on the epidemiological or population level studies. There are a range of basic science studies that will tell us a lot over time about immunity, susceptibility and transmission, but they will tell us very little about school settings. We must be careful about the difference between the theoretical knowledge we get from basic science studies and the practical knowledge we will get from real world studies for real world situations such as transmission in schools.

What type of studies give us the best answers and which type of studies provide indirect information on susceptibility? The working group looked at contact tracing studies which provide a secondary attack rate and potentially provide the most direct evidence on real world susceptibility. It also looked at the strength of the studies and the sources of bias. Studies can be of household, studies of educational settings and they can be very detailed studies where the chain of transmission within those groups is studied in detail. Each of those studies will tell us different things.

Questions and Answers

- **Question 1:** Has the working group developed a study design for evaluation of measures in educational settings such as masks, etc.?
  Answer from Russell Viner: The group has not yet done this, but this could be taken back to the larger group in order to add comments.

- **Question 2:** Could the TAG, jointly with the research group, look at the three study designs that we'd like to recommend for people to take forward in the next six months because the paper lays out the pros and cons of different studies?
  Answer from Russell Viner: One of the areas the group will be working on is the key area of future data collection so formulating that as a recommendation of study types to take forward is certainly part of what we're going to be doing when we have finished this document off.

- **Comment:** The challenge in 'chain of transmission' is role of adults, i.e. staff in schools. TAG member suggests that this is incorporated.

- **Outcome:** TAG members agreed that this paper is a valuable resource and should be made publicly available, e.g. as a peer review publication and a joint WHO/UNICEF/UNESCO resource.
3. Presentation on Survey Results on School Reopening
   ➢ Presented by Nicolas Reuge, Senior Adviser, Education, UNICEF

   o It was recognized that there are opportunities for collaboration with the research group on the impact of inclusion of child health and educational outcomes.
   o The presentation focused on the results of Round 6 of a UNICEF survey delivered to country offices in order to monitor the situation with regard to different phases of the response. Round 6 focuses on monitoring communication campaign and evaluation of preparedness for reopening.
   o In terms of plans for reopening, most countries have plans to at least partially reopen schools and most have plans to reopen nationally. Very few schools did not close. The outstanding question is how to deal with the learning loss from the school closures?
   o A striking finding is that in west and central and east and southern Africa, 90% of countries plan to reopen though there are no allocations from government to support additional measures in order to reopen.
   o Some countries in East Africa (e.g. Kenya) report that they will not open schools in 2020 and will reopen in the new school year in 2021.
   o In order to safely reopen, some countries report that they are staggering school day start and times, physical distancing, providing shifts and reorganizing classes to temporary space.
   o Schools are used as a platform for provision of services including health services. Monitoring student health is critical and there is need to strengthen this with health colleagues as this is a critical element of safe school operations.
   o Very few countries have done all necessary actions for school reopening and are on track with school reopening.
   o A snapshot of UNICEF actions in support of schools include handwashing, sanitation, supplies for monitoring school health and modelling for how to reopen.
   o Upcoming data, from UNESCO, World Bank and UNICEF, focusing on school reopening plans will be available in September.
   o UNICEF will develop a series of research briefs with the Office of Research looking at the impact of schools closures on education, child protection, etc.

Questions and Answers

- **Question 1:** Can we classify the interventions by the degree they decrease educational exposure of children, i.e. how much worse is education by implementing them? It would also be good to highlight win-win interventions, where both health and education are better, e.g. health education, hygiene.

  Answer from Robert Jenkins: UNICEF appreciates the suggestion. This would be ideal as counties wrestle with the various risk mitigation measures and the Pros/Con related.

  Answer from Nicolas Reuge: UNICEF is looking at all measures – what kind of intervention has the most significant impact on child health and attendance in school. One lesson learned is for policy makers to take wash facilities, hygiene in schools and health in schools seriously. Physical distancing is also difficult because many schools are crowded.

- **Comment from Valentina Baltag:** The feasibility of recommended public health measures and their impact on the quality of education is still unknown. Dr Shamez Ladhani and his colleagues are currently conducting an analysis of what we know on the matter. These are important issues to look at as schools are reopening, and we propose this as the them for the next TAG meeting.
4. Update from the small working group on reviewing work on re-opening of primary schools
   ➢ Presented by Dr. Abdirahman Mahamud, Senior Health Emergency Officer within the Division of Health Security and Emergencies at WHO

   o A small working group was established after the 2nd TAG meeting made up of six members. There was a meeting held on the 17th of August provide feedback on the WHO Annex on Reopening of Primary Schools. The summary of feedback was presented:
     o Update the ‘what we know’ section to include most recent evidence
     o Include how to prioritize schools over other re-openings.
     o Highlight the need for messages in home and community to curb the spread of the virus in order for schools to reopen.
     o Provide guidance on closings and reopening for example, what to do if there is a case in 1 class – close school?
   o Next step: request for comments by August 24th at which point WHO will incorporate comments and release the revised Annex by 1 September.

4. Discussion around draft resilience paper
   ➢ Presented by Dr Christopher Castle, Chief of Section, Health and Education, UNESCO

   o At the last TAG meeting Suzanna Grant Lewis, Director of the UNESCO International Institute for Educational planning on school resilience. This was the basis for the 5 questions which were sent to TAG members in order to advance the thinking.
   o There was strong consensus to take a broad approach to look beyond a specific focus on COVID-19 but rather to look at potential crises more broadly.
   o In terms of defining school resilience helpful suggestions included a reminder that this is not only about infrastructure, but also the software including content, teaching methods or pedagogy. Mental support for teachers, students and parents should also be included as part of a broad perspective of school resilience.
   o The next question was about global standards for health promoting schools. There was agreement that the health promoting schools global standards and the eight domains were adequate to frame the school resilience discussion.
   o In terms of developing a framework, the school resilience guide and how others should be involved, there were a number of suggestions including surveys. It is possible to draw on the UNICEF, UNESCO World Bank surveys and upcoming rounds as well
   o The audience is ministries of education as well as at the school level, but it is hoped that it is relevant for multiple audiences.
   o The deadline for review is extended to the 21st August.
   o TAG members were asked if the framework should be published in a peer reviewed journal. There were no objections but suggested other modes of dissemination. It was decided that at the 4th meeting of the TAG, UNESCO will provide an update and a proposed way forward.
     - **Comment:** There are quite a number of ongoing resources in development and it’s possible to consider issues around school resilience in some of those that are in the pipeline.
     - **Comment:** suggestion to develop an infographic to go along with the framework
- **Comment by Robert Jenkins:** Countries are currently discussing risk mitigation measures, making decisions on opening or not, and the timing. There is a note of urgency in providing the evidence and analysis to decision makers so they can make as informed decision as possible and those conversations are very much being are taking place at country level as we speak.

5. **Concluding comments and remarks and practical information regarding the fourth TAG meeting**

- **Comment:** There is a smaller population of young people around the world who have the privilege of being in post-secondary education. It seems as though there is a sense that more countries are thinking of delaying or avoiding face-to-face secondary education. What would the long-term consequences of that be? Perhaps the group could look at this?

- **Comment:** The health promoting school guidelines timeline is April 2021. Could it come out sooner?

- The chair expressed thanks to the TAG members

- The fourth TAG meeting will be held on **September 17 from 13 to 14:30** and will focus on the feasibility of recommended public health measures and their impact on the quality of education. The meeting will be chaired by WHO.