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MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY
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HEALTH SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE

**GUIDELINES FOR THE SAFE OPENING OF SCHOOLS FOR THE 2020-
2021 SCHOOL YEAR – COVID-19 SMART**

Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to provide actionable guidance to school officials for the prevention and early detection of COVID-19 in the school setting. In the longer term, it is anticipated that it will encourage officials, teachers and students to become advocates for disease prevention in and out of the school setting.

Context:

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020, the same day St. Vincent and the Grenadines recorded the first case of COVID-19.

COVID-19 is respiratory illness with multisystem complications caused by infection with the SARS-CoV-19 virus, a novel coronavirus. SARS-CoV-19 is primarily transmitted through person to person contact and through direct contact with respiratory droplets produced when an infected person talks, sings, coughs or sneezes.

Many persons never develop any symptoms, and are described as asymptomatic. Most persons with COVID-19 who have symptoms, will develop very mild to moderate illness and will recover without hospitalization. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, dry cough and tiredness. Less common symptoms include aches and pains, sore throat, diarrhea, conjunctivitis, headache, loss of taste or smell, a rash or discoloration of fingers or toes. In severe cases it may lead to pneumonia, breathing difficulties, clotting disorders, multisystem failure and death.

The management of COVID-19 infections is aimed at treating the specific signs and symptoms of the infection. There are increasing options for these targeted treatment pathways, including steroids, respiratory support and antiviral agents.

There is currently no generally available approved vaccine against SARS-CoV-19 infection. All groups of the population are susceptible to infection with the SARS-CoV-19 virus. Older persons and those with underlying medical conditions, such as diabetes, are at greater risk to have a more serious complication of the disease.

The main tools for preventing the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 are the proven measures used to control respiratory viral infections. These measures are facial coverings, frequent hand washing, respiratory etiquette, cleaning frequently touched surfaces, staying at home when sick (staff and students) and physical distancing.

As of the preparation of these guidelines for the start of the 2020-2021 School year, all of the cases of COVID-19 in St. Vincent and the Grenadines have been imported or import related. There is no community spread of the SARS-CoV-19. None of these cases have required hospitalization for the management of their illness and there have been no fatalities.

GENERAL GUIDELINES – COVID-19 SMART

S – Sanitize be Safe

M – Masks be Safe

A – All of us be Safe

R – Room around us be Safe

T – Take your Temperature be Safe

- ✚ Persons who are unwell **MUST** stay at home.
- ✚ Each school should inform parents and students about the measures the school is putting in place to allow for students to re-enter the premises for classes/activities. Explaining the importance and reasons for school-related measures being implemented.
- ✚ Each school should reinforce the need for strict compliance with the guidelines for the return to school. This can be done using a method best suitable to the school.
- ✚ Each school should take all appropriate actions to protect the health of staff and students from persons who are found to be in any breach of the protocols while on the school compound.
- ✚ Encourage parents and students to follow the guidance from the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment on what to do when someone in the household is sick, quarantined or self-isolating.

CLEANING OF WORKPLACES, WORK EQUIPMENT & FACILITIES:

- ✚ A thorough cleaning of the entire school compound must be done prior to the reopening of all schools.
- ✚ Janitorial staff must be trained to properly clean and sanitize desks, chairs, workstations, tools, equipment, classrooms, labs, workshops, specialist rooms and facilities.
- ✚ A schedule for the routine cleaning of the school during and at the end of the day must be maintained.
- ✚ Janitorial staff must be provided with adequate cleaning and disinfecting supplies and appropriate personal protection equipment necessary to carry out cleaning and sanitizing tasks.
 - Diluted bleach solutions may be used if appropriate for the surface. One part bleach, nine parts water.
 - Principals will provide janitorial staff with a checklist for cleaning which must be signed daily as cleaning is completed.
 - Place garbage bins which are outfitted with disposable garbage bags in each classroom, staffroom, Lab, workshop or specialist room.
 - Ensure that garbage bins are emptied daily and washed at least twice a week.
- ✚ Facilities for hand sanitizing should be available at main points of entry to the school.

VENTILATION OF SPACES:

- ✚ All work spaces, laboratories, specialist rooms and classrooms must be properly ventilated.
- ✚ Keep all doors and windows open, wherever possible.
- ✚ Individual fans must not be used, as they can spread the virus.
- ✚ The use of air conditioning systems is discouraged. Where air conditioning systems must be used, a maintenance schedule for the regular cleaning of filters must be implemented.

DAILY ROUTINE BEFORE SCHOOL:

- ✚ If any member of staff or student becomes ill before arrival at school, the staff and parents of students must inform the Principal and their District Health Officer about this illness and should not go to school unless so directed.
- ✚ All staff and students who must take public transportation to school should wear face coverings and comply with all the necessary precautionary measures.

TRANSPORT TO AND FROM SCHOOL:

- ✚ Face coverings used by all (including students and school staff) in public transport would reduce the risk to the Teachers, Students and Staff as they journey to and from school and therefore support a **home-bubble to school-bubble** system.
- ✚ Face covering used for commuting on public transport to the school must be switched out with a fresh one when students are departing school.
- ✚ Practise hand hygiene protocols on entry and exit of all public transport vehicles
- ✚ Wherever possible, windows of the public transport vehicle should be kept open.

ON ARRIVAL AT SCHOOL:

- ✚ Inform All staff and students about the school's hygiene and safety policies before they enter the premises. Signage to this effect may be strategically posted.
- ✚ Limit the number of persons entering the school compound / premises. People who are not directly involved with the school's activities should not be allowed entry.
- ✚ Consider restricting the number of entry points into the school to control the flow and number of persons on the compound.
- ✚ Implement measures to avoid congestion at the entrance/exit of the school:
 - Consideration should be given to arranging for different small groups of students, according to class/form, subjects or nature of the activities to enter and exit the school to reduce congestion.
 - Designate separate access and exit routes for various groups, where appropriate.
- ✚ Enforce the hand hygiene protocol at the point of entry. Staff and students must wash their hands or apply an approved alcohol-based hand sanitizer on entry to the school compound.
- ✚ Keep open, where feasible, all doors to classrooms, labs, specialist rooms and other areas occupied by staff and students to reduce touching of door handles and to encourage good ventilation.
- ✚ The temperature will be checked and recorded for all school students, teachers and other support staff upon arrival at school each day.

DURING SCHOOL:

- ✚ Updated records of all staff and students must be maintained. The record for each individual must include full name, updated contact number, address and an emergency contact.
- ✚ An updated list of contact numbers for the COVID-19 hotline, District Health Facilities, District Health Nursing Supervisor, District Police Station, Community Health Promotion Officers, District Environmental Health Officer and NEMO Response team, should be kept on record and be readily available.

- ✚ Encourage students to adhere to all the necessary precautionary measures during the school day.
- ✚ Ensure regular cleaning and sanitizing of desks, chairs and the general classroom, laboratory or specialist rooms before and after use.
- ✚ Encourage students to report to their teacher if they are not feeling well.
- ✚ Designate a room for the accommodation of students who develop or display signs of illness.
- ✚ Any student who exhibits signs of illness during class or while on the school compound must be sent/taken to the Sick Bay or designated room and the district medical doctor or nurse must be notified immediately.

Screening:

- ✚ Temperature checks will be taken and recorded for all persons entering the school by Staff trained in the use of non-touch thermometers.
- ✚ Staff would be empowered to ensure that temperature screening is maintained as a way to protect them from potential contagion.
- ✚ Conduct temperature checks in a consistent and uniform manner.
- ✚ Inform each person of his/her temperature readings.
- ✚ Inform staff that data protection and privacy rules should be respected.
- ✚ Anyone with a temperature of 100.1°F and above should be quarantined in the designated space and the health professionals within the district notified immediately. The parents and guardians of the child must be immediately informed.
- ✚ If a child/teacher/school worker is found to have a temperature or any other sign or symptoms of COVID-19 and is removed to the sick bay/identified isolation area, the other children and teacher in the associated classroom/area should be safely transported to their homes to quarantine after reconfirming their documented names and contact numbers. These persons should remain in quarantine until cleared by the health authorities.
- ✚ Encourage students, teachers and staff who are unwell to stay at home and notify the health official within the health district.

PRECAUTIONS FOR UNWELL STUDENTS/STAFF

- ✚ Follow the national protocols where students/staff display any of the symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, dry cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, loss of sense of smell or taste).
- ✚ Parents who have symptoms of COVID-19 must keep their children at home, contact the COVID-19 hotline at 1784 -534-4325 and explain the situation.
- ✚ Parents of children who display symptoms of COVID-19 at home should call the hotline 1784 -534-4325, remain where they are and explain the situation.
- ✚ Staff members who are unwell must stay at home, contact the COVID-19 hotline at 1784 -534-4325 or the healthcare practitioner and notify the ministry of education.
- ✚ If a student upon arrival at school is not well, the student should be placed in the isolated room and notify the parents of the student immediately.
- ✚ Designate a room for the accommodation of staff/students who may develop or display signs of illness while on the compound.
- ✚ Any staff member who exhibits signs of illness while on the school compound must follow the national protocols set out by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.
- ✚ Any staff member with any of the symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, dry cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, loss of sense of smell or taste) must stay at home, contact a medical doctor.

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

- ✚ Parents of any student in need of mental health or psychosocial support may reach out for assistance first with the school counselor, who then will reach out to the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment psychosocial team.
- ✚ Staff in need of mental health and psychosocial support may make use of the counseling services provided by the government.
- ✚ Communicate regularly, clearly and accurately information to staff to ensure that they are kept informed of important developments.

The Ministry of Education has the following three (3) strand approach in place to provide psychosocial support to students, parents and staff;

- ✚ **Strand 1: School Level Response** - This will involve counsellors working with members of their individual student body and staff. This will include individual support, guidance lessons and involvement in online parent meetings at the school level. The school counsellors should ensure that effort is made to reach students who were in need of support prior to COVID 19.
- ✚ **Strand 2: Curriculum Development Unit** - This response will be headed by the Education Officer with responsibility for counselling. This will provide support and guidance to counsellors. In addition the Unit will coordinate with API and other televised guidance lessons and recorded support sessions for students, teachers and parents.
- ✚ **Strand 3: Student Support Services** - This will be coordinated by the Coordinator of Student Support Services and will involve the psychologist, counsellors at the Student Support Services and counsellors from the Schools Guidance Counsellors Association. In addition, the Student Support Services will liaise with the Child Protection Officers within the Ministry of National Mobilization and the SVG Social Workers Association.

The Student Support Services response will take the form of three programmes:

- 1. WhatsApp Parenting Groups** - This will focus mainly on parents who were involved in parenting programmes conducted by the Student Support Services. Each group will be coordinated by a counsellor and include the Coordinator Student Support Services, the psychologist, parenting coordinator and the Child Protection Officer who was involved in the parenting workshop. These groups will form a support structure that allows parents to address concerns through questions that can be responded to in group or individually. It would also allow for the sharing of information by the groups' admins to parents. This information will include parenting tips, links to important sites and videos developed by CDU.
- 2. Online Parenting Sessions** - This will involve the use of online platforms to conduct one hour parenting sessions with parents. These sessions can also be recorded and linked to the Education Media Unit Facebook page.
- 3. Helpline** - This will involve the provision of one to one counselling support. This will involve a team of eight, including the psychologist. There are three numbers that can be called to make appointments for sessions. The sessions will be of 30 minutes duration. Once persons are given an initial appointment, follow up sessions will be arranged at the counsellor/client level. The helpline numbers are 4336929, 4337013 and 4320960. Call for arranging appointments.

Please note that this document may be revised at any time at the discretion of the Health Services Subcommittee of the National Emergency Committee/COVID-19 Task Force, Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment.

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