



Friday, March 13, 2020

**Transition to Education in Time of an Emergency:
COVID-19 Guidance & Protocol for All Education and Education-related Institutions
in Antigua & Barbuda**

The Ministry of Education, Science & Technology continues to monitor national, regional and international reports of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), its impact on educational environments and on the modes and methods of delivery of education and training. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. We continue to collaborate with the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment and guided by the Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda as we seek to mitigate the impact of the disease, particularly, on the wider education community.

On Wednesday, March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a pandemic. As of noon yesterday, there were 132,536 cases in 123 countries and 4,947 confirmed deaths. WHO expects the number of cases, deaths and affected countries to climb even higher, exacerbated “by alarming levels of inaction. This is the first pandemic caused by a coronavirus.”

Today, Friday 13th March, Prime Minister Gaston Browne announced that Antigua and Barbuda recorded the country’s first confirmed case of COVID-19. The patient being a female who arrived from the United Kingdom on March 11, 2020. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, informed by the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment, the lead Ministry on health matters, continues to monitor the situation daily and awaits the Cabinet’s guidance and decision.

Education systems in countries with confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been completely disrupted. K-12 systems of public and private education are either suspended, resort to hybrid methods of delivery of education, or closed. Colleges and universities have transitioned or are transitioning to virtual instruction for classes, and students admonished not to return to campuses after the Spring recess but to meet academic requirements remotely until further notice. Similarly, in Antigua and Barbuda, all K-12 public and private institutions, colleges and universities must take all necessary measures to mitigate the impact on their institutions and, as needed, reasonable initiatives for students to continue meet academic requirements remotely. It is critical that we begin to transition now to non-essential gatherings not exceeding a regular class size.

Despite best efforts to arrest the spread of COVID-19, we still face uncertainty and the considerable unease brought about by this uncertainty. In addition to the March 3rd, 2020 Protocol for Education Institutions issued by Ministry of Education, Science & Technology, it is necessary to implement additional changes informed by recommendations of leading health officials and consistent with education systems around the world.

EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS WORKPLACE PLANNING



The circumstances concerning COVID-19 are evolving and the delivery of education continues with appropriate measures to protect the educational community. The remarkable efforts of staff to support scholastic achievements is commended. All staff are expected to execute duties, adapting as the situation evolves.

School Closure

Consistent with best efforts to mitigate the spread and effects of COVID-19, educational institutions, at Cabinet's directive, will close if the school environment is deemed to be no longer safe or conducive for the in-person delivery of education. All educational institutions should make immediate preparations to transition to non-face-to-face delivery of instruction and satisfying academic requirements remotely to the greatest extent possible:

- Tertiary institutions should plan to transition to remote work where ever possible through online classes using Moodle or any other online learning platform.
- Google Classroom is recommended for secondary schools. In instances where schools are at the advance stage of implementation, complete the process urgently. A brochure/guide has been formulation as a support mechanism. Where Google Classroom is not a possibility, each should develop a blog that can be used as an online learning platform. Any other necessary platform(s) supported by the school are encouraged.
- All primary schools should create a blog that could be used as an online learning platform for students, where no other online learning platforms are in use. Education Officers for administration will provide support.
- In order to reach 100% of our learning population the following alternative measures should be put in place:
 - Create a buddy system where a parent (student) with internet and other capabilities is attached to a student who is unable to access that learning platform. Create an environment for sharing (e.g. telephone) for building community learning.
 - Start developing work sheets that could be disseminated to students, once a closure becomes eminent.

Out of Classroom Platforms and Support

The following are suggested educational platforms and are eligible for supplemental funding from the Ministry of Education for schoolwide subscriptions:

1. Google Classroom - <https://classroom.google.com/u/0/h>
2. IXL Personalized Learning - www.ixl.com
3. Moodle - <https://moodle.org>
4. Schoology - <https://www.schoology.com>
5. Edmodo - <https://go.edmodo.com/teachers/>
6. Sakai - <https://www.sakailms.org>
7. Showbie - <https://www.showbie.com>
8. Castle Learning - <https://www.castlelearning.com>
9. iTunes U - <https://www.apple.com/education/>
10. Canvas - <https://www.instructure.com/canvas/?newhome=canvas>
11. Pearson - <https://www.pearsonschool.com>

Preparing to Work Remotely



Staff should explore and prepare in the event they are required to work remotely. Persons with personal devices are encouraged to utilize them. The Ministry of Information and the Board of Education have begun inquiry into sourcing devices especially for public school educators in the upper grades to be able to work remotely.

Should we get to that point, staff input will be critical at all levels to support respective institutions to transition to a mostly online operation for classes, payments, applications, and inquiries. In the coming weeks educational institutions must adjust as necessary.

Health and Wellbeing

All efforts must be employed to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and reduce the potential for transmission. Educational institutions are strongly urged to:

1. Promote social distancing and non-essential gathering (i.e. exercise caution when interacting, touching or greeting with persons, avoid close contact with people showing symptoms of the common cold or flu and avoid large gatherings not exceeding a regular class size).
2. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
3. Cover your cough or sneeze preferably with a tissue and then throw the tissue in a closed bin immediately after use, otherwise, use the flex elbow technique. This technique entails flexing your elbow inward and coughing into your bent elbow.
4. Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. Dry your hands thoroughly with single use paper/napkins and place them in a covered bin. Hands could also be dried using hot-air, where available. We encourage the use of liquid soap.
5. Use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, if soap and water are not available. We encourage hand washing rather than the use of hand sanitizers, where possible.
6. Before each use, clean frequently touched surfaces (e.g. doorknobs, desks, countertops, telephones, keyboards etc.) with 70% ethanol solution, where available, from the office or teachers in the staff room. All bottles removed from the office should be returned after use to be replenished as needed.
7. Students should stay home when sick with any symptoms of the common cold or flu.
8. Teachers who are sick should follow the expected protocol as per the Civil Service Regulation for reporting uncertified illness. As is expected, and in order to reduce the burden on schools, academic tasks should be submitted to their Head of Department/school when reporting ill.
9. If a student should arrive at school or become ill at school with symptoms of the common cold or flu, parents should be called in to pick them up. Schools should identify a space for initial quarantine of student until parents pick them up. Students may need to be referred directly to a health facility, depending on the situation/context.
10. If a teacher should arrive at school or become ill at school with symptoms of the common cold or flu, the teacher should seek permission to return home, as per the expected protocol. The principal may recommend that the teacher seek professional health care, depending on the situation/context.
11. Students are encouraged to bring along a personal pouch containing small packets of hand tissue, hand sanitizer, asthma pumps where needed, and any other items.

Mental Health / Psychosocial Support Needs



Encourage children to discuss their questions and concerns. Explain that it is normal that they may experience different reactions and encourage them to talk to teachers if they have any questions or concerns (journals writing and other forms of literacy writing activities may be used). Provide information in an honest, age-appropriate manner. Guide students on how to support their peers and prevent exclusion and bullying. Ensure teachers are aware of local resources for their own well-being. Work with school counsellors to identify and support students and staff who exhibit signs of distress.

Parent Resources

- National Association of School Psychologist - [https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)
- Responding to COVID-19 - <https://openwho.org/channels/covid-19>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention - <https://www.cdc.gov>
- Preparing for COVID-19 School Closures - <https://hbr.org/2020/03/how-working-parents-can-prepare-for-coronavirus-closures>

Custodians

Custodians should exercise caution while executing their duties. Custodians are strongly encouraged to:

1. Wash hands thoroughly and regularly, especially on completion of duties.
2. Wear gloves while performing their duties ensuring that these are properly disposed of after each use.
3. Ensure that bathrooms are cleaned at regular intervals (doorknobs, faucet handles and face basins should also be disinfected before the beginning of the school day, before and after each break and at the end of the day. Where available 70% ethanol solution should be used.
4. Supervise bathroom use, discouraging abuse of resources and facilities.
5. Clean frequently touched surfaces (e.g. doorknobs, desks, countertops, telephones and other office equipment) with 70% ethanol solution where available.
6. Ensure that waste is properly disposed by properly securing garbage bags in closed garbage containers.

Cafeteria Staff and Vendors

All cafeteria staff and vendor operators on and off the compound of all educational institutions are encouraged to:

1. Follow the expected health protocols as pertaining to food safety including obtaining valid food handlers' certificates. Hands should be thoroughly washed at regular intervals during food preparation and while serving food. Food and vegetables should be thoroughly washed before preparation and all meats and eggs are thoroughly cooked.
2. Disinfect all surface areas in the cafeteria/vendor dispensing area, at the beginning, during and end of the day.
3. Frequently clean surfaces (e.g., countertops and other surfaces).
4. Discourage students from sharing eating utensils. In the event where meals are shared between students, eating utensils should be provided for each student.



5. Place dispensers with hand sanitizers in strategic and accessible places in the school cafeteria where students can sanitize their hands upon entering and leaving the cafeteria and make sure these are regularly refilled.
6. No Cafeteria worker or Vendor should attend to their duties while ill.

Administration and Support Staff

All staff on an educational compound are subject to the supervision of the principal or institutional leader and his/her designee. All staff should follow the same protocol for teachers and other staff pertaining to COVID-19. Hands should be washed and sanitized frequently.

School Bus Drivers and Attendants

School buses should be sanitized before and after each trip (include wiping hand rests, door handles, rails and other hard surfaces). In addition:

1. School bus conductors should sanitize their hands before students enter the bus and when ushering students out of the bus at the end of the trip.
2. Upon entry, each student should show their ID to the School Bus Conductor by holding it up for him/her to see. As best as possible, IDs should not be handled by the school bus conductor.
3. Students should enter the bus in an orderly fashion, following the protocols for coughing and sneezing. Each student should be encouraged to sanitize their hands every time they cough or sneeze in the bus using items from their personal pouch.
4. If a student enters the bus that appears to be ill, a quarantine space within the bus should be used, for the student. This quarantine space could be a single seat within the bus. Upon arrival at school, the School Bus Conductor should accompany the child to the office or inform an adult (teacher, security officer) that the student was ill upon pick up.
5. If a student is ill on pick up, at the end of the day, the same protocol of use of the quarantine space (single seat) should obtain for transfer home. The conductor/driver should try as much as possible to obtain contact information for the parent/guardian and call the parent/guardian informing them of their child/ward illness. The student should be dropped as close as possible to his/her residence.
6. As much as possible, schools should call parents to collect students who are ill and not allow them to be transported via the school bus system.
7. As much as possible, windows should be kept open to allow for fresh air ventilation while transporting students.

Travel Guidance

All Ministry of Education, Science and Technology-related regional and international travel is prohibited until at least April 30, absent further notice. Personal travel is strongly discouraged. Avoid non-essential travel.

Anyone who returned from a location or transited through affected locations of high concern for COVID-19 (see <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/locations-confirmed-cases.html> or for daily updates <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>) and are experiencing high fever, dry cough, difficulty breathing or you suspect that you are at risk are strongly encouraged to seek guidance from the Ministry of



Health, call ahead to your doctor's office or emergency room and/or to self-isolate before visiting an educational institution.

Self-isolation

If you have been advised to self-isolate, WHO and senior health officials recommends that you do so for at least 14 days before returning to an education institution. Avoid contact with others and do not travel while self-isolating. Be guided as follows:

- Remain at your place of residence
- Do not attend class, work, or other gatherings of persons including social events, meetings, rehearsals, practices, clubs, etc.
- No one should be encouraged to go directly to any healthcare provider without a prior phone call so that healthcare providers and facilities can be prepared for the person's arrival.

Travel Reimbursement

Persons traveling on Ministry of Education, Science and Technology business subject to cancellation and change fees consistent, with the instant travel advisory, should submit request to the Permanent Secretary for consideration for reimbursement.

Meetings and Events

COVID-19's impact is an evolving situation. During this pandemic, meetings and events may be cancelled at the last minute. Planners, participants and attendees should make contingency plans, just in case. Meetings or events of any size should be reconsidered.

Non-essential large gatherings exceeding an average class size are strongly discouraged and should be postponed were possible or conducted through remote audio and/or visual technology (Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, etc.).

School-wide assemblies, meetings and similar gatherings are discouraged. Classroom assemblies, particularly in the mornings are strongly encouraged with regular reminders to attendees of measures to avoid the spread of viruses such social distancing, not shaking hands, and refraining from physical embrace or bodily exchange.

Choose spaces for events that prevent the gathering of large crowds. Stagger drink and food stations to avoid crowding and long lines and opt for individual food bags and packages and individual water or juice bottles or other sealed containers. Avoid situations where multiple hands are required to access food and snacks.

Legal Duty

Education Act (2008) *Section 33*, where the principal discovers or has reason to suspect the presence of a contagious disease, they should immediately report the same to the parent of the students and the Ministry of Education. The Ministry will immediately inform the Chief Medical Officer.

Visitations



All visitors to educational institutions excluding staff, students, parents and guardians and education and health officials are strongly discouraged. Anyone visiting an education institution must report to the administrative office and obtain approval from the principal or his/her designee before proceeding onto the compound.

Use of school stationary, equipment and telephones by any visitor is strongly discouraged. Visitors are encouraged to sign visitor logs with their own pens and use their personal communication devices.

All non-essential visitations to educational institutions are discouraged.

As we transition through this difficult time of COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to remember that above all, students look to us mostly for guidance, care and education. Circumstances will continue to evolve and we will manage uncertainty with our ability to adapt and also evolve, recognizing that educating eager minds is a paramount calling.

COVID-19 Hotline: (268) 484-2712.

For further information on COVID-19: <https://www.who.int>