



# Essential safety guidelines for reopening educational institutions

JINAT JAHAN KHAN

As educational institutions are all set to reopen in phases very soon, the challenge of maintaining social distance and proper hygiene measures emerges. Authorities and individuals must follow appropriate guidelines to minimize the potential exposure of the Covid-19. Here is a list of some important steps that should be followed as educational institutions are going to restart after a long break.

## Routine cleaning and disinfecting in campus

Educational institutions must sanitize each and every corner and object of their campus on a regular basis. The frequently touched surfaces such as classroom desks, benches, doorknobs, light switches, handrails, push buttons of elevators, stair rails, etc. must be disinfected daily for all the students, teachers and staff. While cleaning and disinfecting, use soaps or disinfectants according to the need. For

example, soft surfaces such as rugs and carpets can be cleaned with just soap and water or with a normal cleaner. And it is not mandatory to always use disinfectants on less touched surfaces like floors, bookcases etc.

## Reform the learning environment

A hybrid learning environment that allows both offline and online classes on a rotation can be introduced due to the current crisis. In this way, students or faculty will be able to continue courses from home even if they get sick. For offline classes, small classes should be hosted in larger rooms to support social distancing. But if the class is too large or moving into larger rooms to ensure adequate distance is not possible, split it into separate cohorts or rotate the pods in offline and online classes. Try to reduce bottlenecks when students come into or leave classes.

## Availability of hygiene supplies

The authorities should ensure that all the students, teachers and staff have access to essential hygiene supplies including soaps, hand sanitizers, face masks, etc. It is imperative to keep alcohol-based hand sanitizers in every class. The administration may also install hand sanitizer pumps in every floor. In washrooms, liquid soaps should be kept in place of soap bars. If feasible, use physical barriers like shower curtains or plastic flexible screens between the

washroom sinks or other indoor places where it is difficult to maintain 6-feet distance.

## Implement proper housing plans for the students living in dorms/halls

Dormitories must not be at the full capacity. Authorities should consider the number of students per room or per dorm. At least 6-feet distance per head should be ensured in shared hall rooms. There should be separate rooms available where students with Covid-19 or mild Covid-19 symptoms can be kept for isolation.

## Reconfigure the dining halls

In the dining halls, authorities should limit the number of students per table to support distancing of at least 6 feet apart. For long tables, social distancing can be maintained by staggering chairs keeping proper space. Grab-and-go options should be available to reduce congestion. If possible, specified times to come to the dining halls may be introduced keeping course schedules of students in mind.

## Evaluate other public settings and promote social distancing in campus

For common areas including seminar rooms, cafeteria and libraries, reconfigure seating arrangements to maintain 6 feet distance between people as much as possible. Restrict the number of people in such places. If possible, try to space

furniture out such that there is adequate distance between different groups and the gatherings can be minimized. Students or teachers are not accustomed to in-person classes with such restrictions. Hence, they need to be nudged very often to maintain social distancing and follow other Covid-19 rules. Some fun and creative ideas and rules can be taken for this purpose. For instance, a poster where there is a red cross on the picture of handshake reminds people not to shake hands with someone during this pandemic. The doors of classrooms may have posters with a quote such as "No mask, no entry".

## Personal precautionary steps

We all need to be conscious to protect ourselves from the spread of the Covid-19. As the educational institutions are reopening, individuals need to follow some rules themselves besides the administration. Always wear masks and carry a bottle of alcohol-based hand sanitizer when you go to your classes. Keep a record of body temperatures. Measure the body temperature before going out for classes and do this again after returning home. It'll help to detect if there is any anomaly in body temperature. Maintain social distancing and other hygiene etiquettes as much as possible. Consume vitamins and minerals every morning to boost immunity as many of us are stepping out of our safe zones after a long time.