SOP: Post-Lockdown COVID-19 Safety Guidance for Early Childhood Centres

Ensuring a COVID-19-safe environment for Early Intervention Centres, Childcare Centres and Kindergartens.

This COVID-19 hygiene and safety guidance is written to guide early childhood centres to take precautionary measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 disease in the community when the centres reopen for operation as instructed by relevant government authorities. This guideline is written for the context in early childhood centres such as early intervention centres, childcare centres, kindergartens. However, it may also apply to other centres that provide services to children, and schools. This guideline was written by the National Early Childhood Intervention Council, Malaysia, which comprises 26 non-governmental organisations involved in early childhood intervention. This is a ‘living’ document and will be revised as we understand more about the epidemic. It will also be made available in Malay and Chinese.

It is important that early childhood centres take hygiene and safe physical distancing measures seriously as the whole of Malaysia, and worldwide, is fighting a long battle - estimated to be at least another year or two. As members of the community, everyone plays an important role to continue good hygiene practices and safe physical distancing to keep the COVID-19 in control, with or without an enforced Movement Control Order (MCO) or some form of lockdown.

The preventive measures recommended in this document are likely to require adjustments to the school and class schedule, for example shorter school hours and learning time to accommodate time for cleaning and staggering use of common areas.

Safety COVID-19 Training for the Whole School Community

Early intervention centres, childcare centres and kindergartens must provide safety COVID-19 training to ALL staff, parents and students:

- **Communicate with parents and caregivers** about the actions your school are taking, through phone or individual messaging. Explain why the school is undertaking these measures and how parents and caregivers can prepare themselves and their children for the change. Consider sharing this SOP for them to read.

- **Staff training** should be conducted **before school reopens** to ensure all staff are ready to adopt the hygiene and safety measures. When children return to centre/school, ALL staff should be familiar with:
  - Good personal hygiene practices
○ Health checks and screening procedures
○ Using the thermometer correctly (according to manufacturer’s guidelines)
○ Cleaning and disinfection procedures
○ Distancing measures for respective routine and rooms

Staff training should also include an on-site test-run of strategies for sharing information with children, parents and visitors, as well as ways to communicate in a clear and firm manner.

● Train ALL students, parents and caregivers **before school reopens** on all hygiene and safety measures that your school is adopting.
  ○ **Retrain** parents, caregivers and students on a regular basis (weekly, then bi-weekly, and then monthly), especially those who display difficulty complying with the hygiene and safety measures.
  ○ Be caring and understanding but firm when training students, parents and caregivers. Families that choose NOT to follow the guidelines should be informed that their child will be suspended or no longer be allowed to attend the centre as they pose a risk to everyone.
  ○ Communicate in a language that parents, caregivers and students are most comfortable with, whether Bahasa Malaysia or English. If possible, communicate in their native language, e.g. Tamil, Mandarin, Iban, Dusun, Semai, etc.

● Use a **variety of modalities** for training: phone calls, messaging apps, video conferencing, visuals/photos, infographics, videos, etc. Information presented should be in simple and clear language and visuals, and be **children-friendly and disability-inclusive**.

● Some children may need to be told, in a sensitive way, about the coronavirus outbreak and why the school has changed its operating procedure. Here is a list of [COVID-19 Resources for Children](#) that may help adults to talk to children about the coronavirus outbreak.
Universal (Basic) Prevention Measures - Do at all times

Good Personal Hygiene

1) Handwashing
   a) Handwashing steps - See Appendix 1.
   b) Sneeze and cough into the elbow or tissue (with proper disposal).
   c) Ensure sufficient supply of soap and water or hand sanitiser, and they are easily available within reach.

2) Wear a mask at all times for all staffs
   a) Correct way to wear masks - See Appendix 2.
   b) 3-ply disposable masks
   c) Cloth masks: minimum double layer 100% cotton masks with non-woven fabric as filter

3) No sharing of food, utensils, cups, plates, bowls, towels, etc.

4) Dispose dirty tissues or wipes into covered waste bins.

5) Remove and dispose of disposable masks and gloves in a sealed plastic bag and seal it properly.

Clean Environment

Perform routine cleaning and disinfection of surfaces and objects that are frequently touched.

Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces and objects

1) Frequently touched surfaces include: door knobs/handles, light switches, tables, chairs/stools, handrails, classroom sink handles, mats, countertops
2) Frequently touched objects include: toys, learning equipment/apparatus, stationeries, toy/utility baskets, computer (keyboard, mouse), etc.
   - Clean objects after every session by child or staff
3) Effective disinfecting solution against coronavirus:
   - Household bleach diluted with water at 1:100 ratio, e.g. 10ml bleach to 1 litre water
   - Refer to this cleaning and disinfecting guideline from CDC USA.

Maintain Physical (Social) Distancing

1. General rules
   a. Maintain 1-meter distance with other people.
   b. No handshaking, hugging, high-fives or touching another person.

2. Limit nonessential visitors in school
   a. Limit nonessential visits from parents, caregivers and contract workers.
   b. Parents are allowed to pick up and drop off their children.
c. Only visitors who are needed to support the running of the centres/schools are allowed entry, such as therapists, itinerant support teachers, early intervention teachers and inclusion facilitators.

d. Obtain travel declarations for any new visitors to the school.

e. When there are new prospective parents who want to enrol their children, do not allow entry to the centre or school during operating hours. Conduct an online assessment and offer virtual tours (videos, photos) instead.

f. When there are essential repair works or inspection from authorities to be done in the school:
   - arrange to visit at a time when children are not present,
   - practice good personal hygiene and physical distancing at all times,
   - clean and disinfect contact areas after the visit.

3. **Where physical distancing cannot be avoided:**
   There are situations were physical support is required, such as during physiotherapy, occupational therapy, sensory play, handwriting; or when supporting children with physical disabilities and limitations to perform basic tasks, including eating, toileting, changing clothes, wearing shoes, etc.

   In these circumstances, adults (teachers, parents) must wear a mask and gloves, and wash their hands frequently. Do not allow gloves to create false sense of security.

**Health Checks and Screening**

1. Perform health checks, temperature screening, and hand sanitisation at the school entrance for ALL staff, students, and visitors. Failure to declare truthfully may result in suspension or dismissal of the child/family from the centre/school. The family may be reported to the authorities.

2. Identify a space that can be used to temporarily isolate students and staff who suddenly become sick, before they are sent home.

3. Do not allow anyone to enter the school, including staff and students, that have the following situations:
   - **Unwell**
     - Fever or flu-like symptoms (runny nose, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath)
     - They must go home and rest, and only return when they have recovered fully.
   - **Have been in close contact with COVID-19 positive person**
     - Mandatory 14-day Leave of Absence
     - Staff, parents and caregivers should inform the school immediately if they or their child has had close contact with a COVID-19 positive person.
   - **Returning from overseas**
     - All staff and students who just returned from overseas to be given a mandatory 14-day Leave of Absence
4. Increase frequency of temperature taking for all staff and students. Following are some general guidelines:
   a. Half-day programme: 2 times a day - at arrival and dismissal
   b. Full-day programme: 3 times a day - at arrival, afternoon (lunch/nap), dismissal

5. Temperature reading
   a. Average temperature for fever: **37.5°C and above**
   b. Note: Check the thermometer’s manual for its proper use, range of normal temperature readings, and cleaning instructions. Do not use any oral thermometers.
   c. Suggest using non-contact thermometers or temperature scans.

6. If a child is unwell while attending the centre, separate the child from other children to the isolation room/area. Inform parents immediately to bring him/her back home or for medical treatment.

**Put Up Signs**

Put up posters and visuals to remind staff, visitors, and children to practice new preventive measures. Posters and visuals should be clear, child-friendly, and visible to children (at eye level). Recommended signs include but are not limited to:

- Handwashing steps
- Hand hygiene (sneeze/cough into their elbow, put used tissues in a waste receptacle and to wash hands immediately after using tissues)
- No sharing of food, utensils and toys
- Safe Physical (Social) Distancing
- Guidelines when entering and leaving school

Centres and schools are also advised to put up guidelines for maintaining a hygienic environment as reminders for staff, such as:

- Disinfecting surfaces and objects (refer *Cleaning and Disinfecting Surfaces and Objects, pg. 3* )
- Waste management
- Toileting / Showering / Changing diapers
Specific Prevention Measures

This section describes preventive measures that should be taken by all staffs and parents at different times and settings throughout the school routine.

School Arrival or Entering School

Hired Pick-up (Bus/Van) Services

- Provide hand sanitisers in the vehicle to all children before entering the vehicle.
- Drivers are required to wear masks.
- Adjust pick up service schedule to reduce the number of children in the vehicle at one time.
- Assign a specific seat to each child.
- Increase seating distance between children by designating seats for 1 person on each row, seated diagonally with the person in the previous row. Example:

![Diagram showing seating arrangement]

- Take the temperature of each child before boarding the vehicle.
- Advice sick children to stay at home.
- Keep windows open and adjust air-conditioning to promote air circulation.
- Regularly clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces, such as: door handle, handrail, windows. Periodically clean all seats.

Travelling to School by Public Transport

- Avoid touching your face.
- Wash or hand sanitise your hands after touching commonly touched surfaces, such as: door handle, handrail, windows.
- Whenever possible, maintain a safe distance from other passengers.
  - Seat your child on the row in front of you where you can keep an eye on them.
  - If your child is young or have difficulty sitting on her own, you may carry your child with you, or sit next to you.
  - Recommended seating arrangement is 1 passenger on each row, seated diagonally with the passenger in the previous row. Example:

![Diagram showing seating arrangement]

- Whenever possible, open windows to increase airflow.
Arrival at School

1) Spread out the arrival time for all children. Arrange blocks of drop-off time for a small number of children, at 10-15 minute intervals. It is recommended that the number of children do not exceed 5 for each time block.

2) In early intervention centres (EIPs) where parental participation is encouraged, perform health checks and practice safe physical distancing.

3) Where relevant, parents/guardians who are just sending their children must not enter the school compound. Only drop-off at the main entrance (gate or door). Options for drop-off:
   - Children and parents/caregivers should wait in the car until they are given the signal to come forward.
   - Provide a large space for waiting during drop-off at arrival time. Put up 1-meter queue markers as guidance while they wait.

4) Parents/guardians shall not gather outside the school compound.

5) Children (and parents in EIPs) shall go straight to their classrooms when they complete their health check. Teachers may have to bring students into the classrooms if necessary.

Temperature Screening and Health Checks

1) Perform health checks and temperature screening at the school entrance for all staff, students, and visitors.

2) Place hand sanitisers at the health checkpoint and advise individuals who can enter the school to clean their hands before entering.

3) Designate the staff members to perform the health check and screening at the entrance. Appoint at least 2 staff members who regularly rotate for this duty (one for backup). Staff should practice good hygiene during screening.

4) If a child is unwell, tell parents that he/she must stay at home and rest, and only return when he/she has recovered.

Handling Homework and Library Returns

1) Designate a specific basket/box to place homework and/or return items at the child’s height level. Staff should sanitise accordingly.

2) Consider digital submission of worksheets via email or virtual classrooms.

3) If the child has similar learning materials at home, avoid lending centre materials to the child. Provide instructions to parents/guardians on how to use similar materials at home for the same learning goal.

4) If toys, equipment and material lending is allowed:
   a) Consider using digital catalogue/record for parents to browse available toys, equipment and materials online instead of entering the centre.
   b) If physical presence in the centre’s resource room or library is necessary, limit the number of persons at one time in different sections of the space.
Safe Distancing during School Hours

Think about how staff, children, and visitors move and interact in your centre or school. Where are the hotspots?

- Common spaces that all classes use?
  E.g. dining area, hall playground, toilets, computer room, library, play area, garden, etc.
- Places with many people gathering together?
  E.g. hallway, main entrance, waiting area, bag/shoe/bottle racks, wash basin
- Narrow corridors and walkways? Are there times when more than one group of children walk through the same corridor or walkway?
- Activities in narrow/tiny spaces? Are there times when activities are conducted in a small room with more than 5 people?

Centres/schools should limit overlapping movement of children and staff within the centre compound as far as possible to minimise interaction between children from different classes:

- Children to stay within their own classrooms or floors.
- Do not interact with students from other classes at the corridors, walkways, common spaces.
- Stagger movement times to toilet and common spaces such as outdoor and hall.

Staff should discuss and make adjustments to all class schedules to make room for the changes necessary to ensure safe distancing between children during school hours, such as staggering mealtime and separating the usage of common areas.

In doing this, it is necessary to plan in transition and waiting times to avoid rushing through the schedule and school routine, which can result in compromised safety and hygiene practices. This might mean that time for teaching and learning may be shortened. However, these preventive measures are important to ensure a COVID-19-safe environment for the whole school community.

Classroom Environment

1) Identify a clean, clear (uncluttered) and airy empty classroom/space to conduct lessons temporarily to reduce risk of virus exposure.
2) Open windows and doors to allow airflow and better ventilation. Generally, avoid air-conditioning if possible as it recirculates the room’s air.
3) Setup lesson space (table, chairs and the needful) within the safe and recommended distance (at least 1 meter) according to the size of the room. Attempt to space out children as much as possible in the room.
4) No sharing of classrooms/therapy/play rooms between different classes.
5) Clean and sanitize the room and all items inside after every session before the next group of children uses it.
   - Tip: Remove or close off unused items, shelves, storage space to minimise likelihood of accidental or unplanned touching to avoid virus spread within the space.
● Plan cleaning time into the schedule to ensure they are carried out properly. This may mean shorter time for lessons and activities.

Class in session

1. One-to-one sessions
   ● Only ONE teacher with ONE child during table activities (i.e. per cubicle spaced at least 1 meter apart)
   ● Only ONE parent is allowed, if and only needed on a case to case basis (e.g. child with separation anxiety, full physical support, behavioural needs/support).
   ● Disinfect all surfaces and objects after each session before the next child’s turn.
   ● Wash hands with soap and water or hand sanitiser before and after lessons and activities. Make hand sanitiser or wash basin available within easy reach.

2. Group activities
   ● Reduce or cancel group activities.
   ● Set up more individual activities around the room. Rather than place all of your books and blocks on one shelf, put them up in separate areas throughout the room where possible.
   ● If conducting group activities, maximum 2-3 teachers with 3 students in a room. And make sure everyone is spaced at least 1 meter apart.
   ● Avoid activities that require touching another person, e.g. holding hands, shake hands, high 5, etc.
   ● Avoid group activities that require everyone to sit on the mat. Instead, consider using informal opportunities to engage with the children, for example: read books or do story telling with one or two children at a time throughout the day.
   ● Disinfect all surfaces and objects after each session before the next group’s turn.
   ● Increase handwashing frequency and ensure handwashing items are easily reached.

   ● Social activities suitable for safe physical distance:
     ○ Music, singing, dancing (solo), Zumba
     ○ Story telling
     ○ Simple art and craft
     ○ Stationary exercises, movement (upper body), yoga, sit-down exercises
     ○ Watching videos, playing computer games (1 computer each person)
     ○ Social games: Bingo, Memory game, Guess Who, Connect Four, Tic-tac-toe, etc.

   ● Avoid activities that are not suitable for safe physical distance, example:
     ○ Sharing of common toys, teaching materials and tools
     ○ Sharing of therapy or play rooms
     ○ Outings to public places
     ○ Outdoor activities such as playground, water play, messy sensory play
     ○ General assembly / group meetings
3. **Class size**
   - 2-3 teachers with 3 students.
   - One or two extra staff is allowed only for emergency situations.
   - Schools of course may not have bigger classroom environments and will have to adjust by perhaps splitting the class to a smaller size or having two sessions.

4. **Presence of volunteers or parents in classrooms**
   - Limit the presence of volunteers for classroom activities, mealtime support, and other activities.
   - This includes parents, cleaning staff, teachers from another class, cook, repair workers, etc.
   - Parents / caregivers will wait for their child outside or in the waiting area at allocated seats.

**Toileting**

1) **Stagger toileting time**
   a) Avoid having multiple classes going to the toilet at the same time, such as right after lunch or recess, or messy or outdoor play.
   b) Teachers from all classes are advised to discuss their daily class schedules to avoid clashes for toileting time.

2) **Maintain safe physical distance.** Place 1-meter markers outside the toilet to guide children.

3) Place toilet hygiene visuals/posters at children’s eye level, such as:
   a) Close the toilet seat cover after using and then flush the toilet
   b) Wash hands after using toilet

**Mealtimes - Recess/Lunch**

1) Children and staff should have their meals in their respective classrooms to maintain safe distancing with children from other classes. And ensure that children are seated 1 meter apart from each other, e.g. at the end of the table, or use more tables.

2) No sharing of food and utensils.

3) If there is a need to use a common eating location (example a canteen or a common dining area), then:
   - Stagger mealtimes by class and do not mix class groups.
   - Clean surfaces (tables, chairs) before the next group/class comes in for meals.

4) Cook or food-handler should wear mask or spit-guards and avoid interacting with children.

5) Individually packed food is encouraged.
Showering and Changing

Showering
- Avoid showering children in the centre. Limit showering to children who soiled themselves or have skin conditions.
- If showering is necessary, shower ONE child at a time. Wash (rinse) the bathroom or contact areas carefully after each shower before another child uses it.

If changing a child’s clothes becomes necessary:
- Implement clothes/diaper changing ONE child at a time.
- When changing children out of dirty clothes, staff must wear a mask.
- Immediately put dirty clothes in a (laundry) bag and close it. For dirty diapers, throw them into a covered waste bin straightaway.
- Staff and children must wash their hands after changing.

Nap time
1) Children are advised to sleep in their respective classrooms and avoid inter-class mixing during nap time.
2) Assign each child an individual cot, mattress, pillow, etc which is labelled with their name.
3) Space children 1 meter apart.
4) If staff is needed to help children to take a nap, make sure they are wearing a mask and wash their hands after supporting children.

School Dismissal or Leaving the School Compound
1) Spread out the pick-up time for all children. Arrange blocks of pick-up time for a small number of children, at 10-15 minute intervals.
2) Parents/caregivers should arrive at the school just before the designated pick-up time to reduce waiting time, and avoid gathering in groups.
3) Provide a large space for parents/guardians during waiting time. Put up 1-meter distance markers as guidance while they are waiting to pick up their children.
4) Conduct temperature taking for all children, staff and visitors leaving the school.
5) Avoid speaking with parents/guardian about the child’s day at school to avoid congregating for a prolonged period. Communicate via phone or messaging app instead.
6) Clean and disinfect the commonly touched areas, tables and chairs, equipment, objects, etc before the next group’s arrival.

Children Arriving Home
- Children should immediately shower after returning home before interacting with other household members (avoid touching or hugging).
- The clothes that children were wearing in school must be soaked in soap and water.
Outside School Hours

- Advise parents to reduce and postpone play groups and parties outside of school.
- Advise parents to observe safe physical (social) distancing guidelines outside of school. 
  Resource: Social Distancing by Dr Toh Teck Hock, Sibu, Sarawak.

Work Preparation for Teachers/Therapists

- Teachers/therapists are advised to prepare lessons in their respective classrooms and maintain 1-meter distance from each other.
- If materials are in common areas such as library, resource room or office, make arrangements so that only 1-2 persons are in the space at any one time. For example, queue numbers or a room usage schedule.
- When there is more than one person in the preparation area, stand or sit facing away from each other and maintain a safe physical distance.

Staff Meetings and Training

1) Reduce face-to-face meetings and staff training, especially non-essential ones.
2) Conduct meetings over emails or teleconferencing instead.
3) Choose online training whenever possible.
4) For essential training that cannot be conducted online:
   - Space out seating for training participants at least 1 meter apart.
   - Avoid activities that require physical contact.
   - Provide individually packed food instead of buffet-style meals.
5) Staff are advised not to congregate or chit-chat.

When a confirmed case has entered a school

- Close the school for 3-5 days
- Communicate with parents, children and staff. Do not reveal the identity of the infected staff, child or parents and communicate in such a way to counter potential stigma and discrimination.
- Clean and disinfect the school thoroughly:
  - Close off areas used by the individuals with COVID-19 and wait at least 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimise potential for exposure to respiratory droplets. Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area.
  - Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas (e.g. offices, bathrooms, and common areas) used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.
○ If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.

**Virtual Learning for Homebound Children**

Prepare for and provide virtual learning and instruction to children who are unable to attend school physically. Children that are in high-risk groups and may be required to stay at home include:

- Children with a compromised immune system
- Children with complex medical needs
- Has a household member on a quarantine order or known to be COVID-19 positive
- Has overseas travel history within the last 14-days to COVID-19 countries

Implement virtual learning plans, including digital and distance learning options as feasible and appropriate to ensure continuity of education/learning programme. Schools/centres are advised to consider the following while making plans for virtual learning:

- How to convert face-to-face lessons into online lessons and how to train teachers to do so.
- How to manage and troubleshoot technical issues if faced with limited IT support and staff.
- How to encourage appropriate adult supervision while children are using distance learning approaches.
- How to deal with the potential lack of students’ access to computers and the Internet at home.

In combination with virtual learning, schools/centres also need to take into consideration the minimum number of hours or days for in-person instruction and learning in the school/centre to ensure that children have a meaningful learning experience.
Appendix 1: Handwashing

Hand hygiene is an important measure to prevent the transmission of viruses.

When should Childcare Providers and children wash their hands?

- Upon arrival at the Centre
- Before preparing, serving or eating food & after eating
- After using the bathroom
- After changing child’s diaper or helping a child in the bathroom
- After wiping noses, mouths, sores or cuts
- After handling any body fluids, e.g. diarrhoea, mucus or vomit
- After playing outdoor
- Anytime your hands look dirty

Some tips to ensure Childcare Providers and children wash their hands thoroughly:

- Use liquid soap
- Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds (sing a hand washing song while they wash their hands to help them remember to scrub thoroughly. Singing a song like “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” or “Happy Birthday” through twice or “Baby Shark” should take about 20 seconds.)
- Use hand sanitisers sparingly, only when soap and water is not available (field trips); hand sanitisers should not replace handwashing with soap and water when available.
- Use disposable paper towels and tissues (properly disposed).

Follow these steps to do handwashing. Post these steps, with pictures, on the wall near the sink as a reminder.

1. Turn on water.
2. Wet your hands with running water.
3. Apply liquid soap.
4. Rub your hands together for at least 20 seconds. Rub the palms and backs of your hands, scrub under nails, and rub between fingers. (When teaching children to wash their hands, introduce a hand washing song to be sure they have scrubbed long enough.)
5. Rinse your hands under running water for at least 10 seconds.
6. Dry your hands with a clean, disposable paper towel.
7. Turn off the water tap using the paper towel instead of your bare hand.
8. Throw the paper towel away in a lined trash container.

Posters on handwashing:
World Health Organisation (WHO) Eng
Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH) BM
Appendix 2: How to wear mask properly

How to put on a face mask
1. Choose the appropriate mask size. Use a child size if available for children.
2. Clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitiser before touching the mask.
3. Take a mask and make sure there are no holes on either side of the mask.
4. Make sure you have the mask on its correct sides: a) stiff metallic strip is the top, b) coloured layer is outside if using a 3-ply surgical mask. A cloth mask is also useful and allows for medical masks to be kept for healthcare professionals.
5. Cover your mouth and nose with the mask and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask. Secure the mask firmly according to the instructions for the relevant type of masks.
6. Avoid touching the mask while using it. If you touched your mask, clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitiser.
7. Replace the mask with a new one as soon as it is damp and do not re-use single-use masks. Cloth masks should be washed with soap and water and dried before reuse.

How to remove a face mask
1. Avoid touching the front of the mask, because it is contaminated. Only touch the ear loops/ties.band and remove from behind.
2. Immediately throw the mask in a covered waste bin or sealed plastic bag.
3. Clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitiser.
4. Cloth masks should be removed carefully and placed into a sealed plastic bag or a pail with soap and water.

Poster for Wearing a Mask Properly: WHO Eng

Some Useful References
5. Social Distancing Posters, Malaysia http://tiny.cc/SocDis2020

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