



INTERIM GUIDANCE NOTE

Mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and nutrition of schoolchildren

Acknowledgments

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Mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and nutrition of schoolchildren

While cases of COVID-19 appear to be fewer among children (and symptoms generally milder), national responses to the pandemic can have important consequences for child nutrition and educational outcomes.

Nearly 1.5 billion children – more than half of the world's student population – are being kept away from school due to pandemic response measures. Nationwide school closures are in force in more than 180 countries while in many others there are localized closures which threaten to become countrywide.

The disruption and closure of schools around the world will have a negative impact not just on children's right to education but on other human rights including their right to adequate food. More than 350 million schoolchildren in countries with nationwide and localized closures, might not have access to regular school feeding and nutrition services during the pandemic.

Adequate nutrition is essential for schoolchildren's health and wellbeing. Many of the children who benefit from school feeding programmes could already be nutrient deficient, vulnerable or at risk. These children rely heavily on such programmes¹: either it's the only meal/snack they consume in the day or contribute a significant part of their daily nutrient requirements.

It is difficult to predict how long school closures will last, so the health, food security and nutrition of the most vulnerable children must be prioritized. Expected negative economic impacts and the potential disruption of local food systems², together with household mitigation behaviours can further restrict children's access to adequate food³ and diet quality⁴. Furthermore, in countries with home grown school feeding programmes, the livelihoods of smallholder farmers

and suppliers are at risk when such programmes are disrupted.

In countries where schools remain open, families may also be affected by economic slowdown and fluctuating food prices, and it will be more important to ensure that children have access to nutritious school meals and nutrition services.

Where school feeding services continue, there are concerns over gaps in water and sanitation infrastructure and the inability to comply with physical distancing and hygiene measures, as required by governments and by the World Health Organization (WHO). In some cases, fear of infection can also keep children away from school and from having access to school feeding.

This joint note from the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations' Children Fund (UNICEF) intends to provide government decision makers, school administrators/staff and partners with preliminary guidance on how to support, transform or adapt school feeding (in the short term) to help safeguard schoolchildren's food security and nutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specific recommendations are provided according to the various target groups involved in school feeding. An additional section is focused on the case of homegrown school feeding.

This guidance note will be regularly updated as the situation evolves, and new information becomes available. It complements other guidance from specialized UN agencies, such as UNESCO, WHO and partners.

The main recommendations are summarized below:

¹ School feeding programmes are key to guaranteeing schoolchildren's entitlements to adequate, safe and nutritious food without discrimination, in conditions of equality and equity.

² See: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca8308en/ca8308en.pdf>

³ The exact impact of the pandemic on the nutrition situation of countries is unknown at this stage, but lessons from Ebola virus disease outbreaks indicate that food availability and access will likely be affected.

⁴ See: <http://www.fao.org/2019-ncov/q-and-a/en/>

WHERE SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED

- Maintain flexibility and responsiveness to changing conditions for supply and distribution of food and provision of nutrition services, while ensuring compliance with COVID-19 protocols.
- Use available resources to safeguard schoolchildren's food security and nutrition.
- Build upon existing safety-net structures to cover vulnerable schoolchildren.
- Ensure food and nutrition needs of vulnerable schoolchildren are considered when designing any large-scale national response to COVID-19.
- Plan for the future reopening of schools, if possible with specific benchmarks.

WHERE SCHOOLS REMAIN OPEN

- Comply with COVID-19 prevention protocols.
- Promote optimal water, sanitation and hygiene services and ensure optimal hygiene and other key behaviours of children, teachers and foodservice staff/volunteers, school canteens and regulation of food vendors.
- Ensure and continue the provision of essential school health and nutrition package (school feeding, micronutrient supplementation, deworming, malaria prevention and oral hygiene)
- Avoid potential deterioration in food safety standards.
- Ensure adequate nutrition content of meals.
- Create contingency plans for the distribution of meals/food baskets in preparation for potential rapid closure of schools.



Considerations where schools are closed

MAINTAIN FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS TO CHANGING CONDITIONS FOR SUPPLY AND DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD, AND PROVISION OF NUTRITION SERVICES WHILE ENSURING COMPLIANCE WITH COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

A human rights-based approach grounded in international law in responding to the global outbreak of COVID-19 is recommended to ensure that emergency interventions focus on the most vulnerable while respecting the rights and dignity of all.

The principle of do no harm should be the overarching consideration. The main priority should be to ensure that such responses do not become a focus of infection and a risk to either families nor to staff/ volunteers and suppliers. All precautions should be taken to ensure compliance with physical distancing and hygiene protocols as dictated by the national and international health authorities (i.e. WHO)⁵.

Flexibility will be key to respond to rapidly evolving and complex conditions and measures, including working with new partners, being adaptable and innovative on supply and delivery mechanisms.

Recommendations for government decision makers at national and subnational level:

- Establish an emergency taskforce at national level to deal with school feeding (including line ministries of health, social protection, education and agriculture), either as part of a broader response to the food and nutrition situation, or independently, to rapidly assess the situation and provide options of feasible responses seeking to maintain the participation of the different stakeholders and involving affected communities to the greatest extent.
- Consider providing autonomy or flexibility to regions and localities to make quick decisions based on their available resources, capacities and needs.
- Use mass media channels to inform schools, suppliers and families of decisions and changes and to reduce anxiety over food distribution.

- If possible, set accountability mechanisms (e.g. hotlines), to verify that children's right to food is respected during the delivery of school meals.
- Where possible, the role of national human rights institutions, ombudsmen or specially appointed commissioners can be considered to ensure that new school feeding modalities are implemented in accordance to human rights principles during the emergency response to COVID-19.
- Where possible, use mobile and radio networks (community radio), to ensure official guidance and to disseminate successful approaches (e.g. recording and sharing videos of correct application of physical distancing and hygiene standards).

Recommendations for school actors and partners working at school level, including civil society and private sector:

- Support schools to rapidly assess needs and identify areas for collaboration in terms of food supply, preparation and delivery.
- Consider mechanisms to provide families with dry take-home rations to ensure uninterrupted food supply to children despite closures.
- If feasible and safe, coordinate for meal preparation and/or delivery.
- Offer multiple collection points for families to avoid large gatherings.
- Organize online networks and maps, using digital tools to help coordinate approaches and responses (identify key gaps and duplication of efforts).

USE AVAILABLE RESOURCES TO SAFEGUARD SCHOOLCHILDREN'S FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

Different countries have applied a range of options to continue modified school feeding services as much as possible, often focusing on the most vulnerable. Where specific large-scale national response to COVID-19 are designed they should ensure that the food and nutrition

⁵ See: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

needs of vulnerable schoolchildren are considered in the design. In addition to continuation of school feeding, models to ensure the delivery of Iron and Folic Acid Supplementation and deworming should be explored.

These options include:

- Keeping canteens open with a flexible schedule to avoid large gatherings, while ensuring excellent compliance with hygiene and physical distancing guidelines.
- Organizing home-deliveries of food baskets/kits/packages, making use of available means of transportation (e.g. school buses, delivery trucks, bicycles, etc.).
- Distributing food baskets/kits/packages, through various collection points (e.g. schools, food banks, restaurants).
- Distributing grab and go meals curbside or through collection places.
- Providing cash or voucher transfers as a school meal replacement (if possible, through an integration in existing cash-based safety-net structures).
- Expanding access to nutrition entitlements and consider the suspension of legal requirements leading to restriction of eligibility;
- When physically and economically viable, setting up direct linkages with smallholder farmers for home/community delivery of fresh foods (see section on homegrown school feeding below).
- Consider partnering with non-traditional partners such as Postal Services to ensure delivery of healthy meals to households, especially where distance is an issue.

Lessons learnt from other epidemics such as the Ebola outbreak, point to the efficacy of interventions such as the reallocation of food from the school feeding programme to the overall emergency response, to address the entire vulnerable households or the use of school canteens to reach extremely vulnerable groups, such as children living in Ebola-affected households and Ebola-orphans living in hosting families. Rather than directly targeting Ebola-affected households, all children attending the selected schools were targeted and as such school feeding helped communities overcome stigmatization and rebuild trust towards agencies and authorities.

Recommendations for government decision makers at national and subnational level:

- Rapidly assess options available and consult with localities to determine the most feasible response or set of responses. When assessing the options consider:
 - the level of food security and nutrition of children;
 - the feasibility to continue distribution or whether movement is severely restricted;
 - the ability to change packaging were needed to ensure food safety; and
 - the modality of food supply and preparation.
 - the functioning of markets and payments services
 - the feasibility of developing a mechanism to provide children with micronutrient supplements for consumption at home under parental supervision (some countries have established such models to continue supplementation during vacations/holidays), especially in countries with high prevalence of anemia.
- Maintain, as much as possible, the food supply from smallholder farmers when contractual arrangements are already in place (see section on homegrown school feeding below).

Recommendations for school actors and partners working at school level:

- Provide timely information to local governments on main challenges.
- Ensure that commodities in stock are used independently of the response chosen to avoid unintended food waste.
- Where possible, use mobile networks to communicate and coordinate with families.
- Ensure optimal hygiene and physical distancing behaviours from staff, volunteers and families, independent of the modality chosen.
- When considering food baskets: promote the collection of multiple packages at once to avoid further logistical issues and unnecessary contacts and ensure enough and well-distributed collection points.
- Where possible and acceptable from the community, maintain an updated database containing schoolchildren's household information to facilitate possible enrolment in cash-based safety nets
- Publish successful approaches (videos, pictures, blogs)

in recognized/official social media accounts for other actors to see.

- Provide technical assistance to government counterparts on how to manage donations of food by different stakeholders in light of the nutritional needs of children.

Examples of country responses⁶

- In Costa Rica, initially, the government decided to keep school canteens open amid school closures but later decided to set up collection points for distributing food baskets to families. Such food baskets include perishables and fresh foods sourced from smallholder farmers.
- In Colombia, the ministry of education is giving autonomy to the regions to make decisions on school feeding responses according to their capacities and needs.
- In Kerala, India, teachers have been communicating with families to collect or distribute food baskets in their localities.
- In the United Kingdom, the government has released preliminary guidance for vulnerable schoolchildren, promoting various approaches ranging from providing families with supermarket vouchers to maintaining some school canteens open for children of families working in health, police and delivery services.

The nutrition content of the meals or food baskets/kits/packages provided is also a priority. When resorting to cooked meals, the following recommendations can be considered:

- Maintain similar or enhanced nutrition content of the meals regularly provided in school.
- If feasible, include fresh fruits or vegetables, prioritizing purchases from local and smallholder producers.
- To the extent possible, avoid providing meals or food products with low nutrition content that do not meet nutrition needs (e.g. packed juices with low fruit and high sugar content, sugar packages, packaged snacks that are high in saturated fats, sugar and salt, etc.
- If providing multiple meals at the same time, ensure that families know how and have the means (e.g. in terms of storage) to keep them safe at home.

When resorting to food baskets/kits/packages, the following recommendations are important:

- Include foods that are of high nutrition value such as pulses, UHT milk, eggs, fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid including food products with low nutrition content.
- Include simple information to families on a) local provisions to reduce the risk of contagion and b) the need to ensure that children's diets are prioritized in the household (e.g. to ensure that children are consuming the food as intended).⁷

When resorting to cash and voucher transfers, the following recommendations are important:

- Promote a transfer value with a similar or enhanced nutrition content of the school meals
- Utilize nutrition messages and education to better enable cash transfers to promote improvements in
- Where possible, favour female household member as the recipient of the transfer
- Where possible, select contactless transfer mechanisms to mitigate opportunities for the virus to spread

BUILD UPON EXISTING SAFETY-NET STRUCTURES TO COVER VULNERABLE SCHOOLCHILDREN

Where school feeding programmes are not flexible enough, logistics or resources do not allow for alternative solutions for food distributions to children, other options could be explored to support their food security and nutrition. Existing safety-net structures which have contingency operating procedures, can be capitalized on to expand and include vulnerable schoolchildren.

Recommendations for government decision makers at national and subnational level:

- Identify how well vulnerable schoolchildren are covered by the country's main social safety-nets.
- Build upon existing school databases for targeting the most vulnerable.
- Consider re-allocating financial resources earmarked for school feeding to national safety-net budgets conditioned to including vulnerable schoolchildren.
- Identify safe registration measures and consider adjustments to transfer modalities, including an informed decision on whether to distribute cash or food vouchers.

⁶ These responses are constantly evolving and may change through time. See: <https://www.presidencia.go.cr/comunicados/2020/03/mep-garantiza-el-derecho-a-la-alimentacion-entregando-paquetes-de-comida/>, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>

⁷ See: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/easy-affordable-and-healthy-eating-tips-during-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak>

- Consider expanding coverage to children who did not benefit from school feeding programmes previously but would likely be impacted by the emergency.

Social protection mechanisms which face disruption including delays, coverage, operational and financial capacities due to the COVID-19 emergency can also follow recently defined guidance⁸.

In a municipality in Brazil, cash is being transferred to families using a card normally used for acquiring school materials. The transfer amount will vary according to the number of meals children usually receive in schools.

ENSURE FOOD AND NUTRITION NEEDS OF VULNERABLE SCHOOLCHILDREN ARE CONSIDERED WHEN DESIGNING ANY LARGE-SCALE NATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Under the current pandemic and the expected global economic downturn, many governments are introducing additional measures to address an increased vulnerability of their population.

In order to support schoolchildren during this critical time, any new design should ensure that the food security and nutrition needs of this age group are addressed, considering baseline food security and malnutrition situation, gender issues, social norms influencing food behaviors and socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

Examples of countries which have recently augmented the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic⁹

- Peru's Ministry of Social Inclusion is re-distributing 30 million soles to ensure the preferential assistance to the most vulnerable populations.

- The Thai government approved 400 billion baht economic package to reduce the impact of the outbreak. The package will cover all sectors and is designed to benefit 14.6 million low-income earners who account for 22 percent of the Thai population – a total of 50,000 village funds nationwide, 7.2 million farming households and 3 million small-to-medium-sized enterprises (99 percent of all business enterprises).

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE REOPENING OF SCHOOLS, IF POSSIBLE, WITH SPECIFIC BENCHMARKS

Recognizing the uncertainty on the duration of school closures, it is important for government authorities dealing with school feeding to consider a plan for when reopening occurs. The main aim would be to assess damage and needs, offset critical disruptions and supporting those that could have been left behind.

Recommendations for government decision makers at national and subnational level:

- Request schools, localities and suppliers to take stock of school feeding challenges and opportunities experienced during the emergency.
- Compile and document such challenges and opportunities.
- Keep track of areas that did not manage to continue school feeding in any form.
- Draft a plan, if possible, with specific benchmarks, for gradual re-establishment of school feeding, nutrition and WASH programmes.
- Prepare teachers, staff, parents, students, and the community for the school reopening and the continuation of school feeding, health and nutrition services.

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_3840

