

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. PREAMBLE..... | 2 |
| 2. PURPOSE..... | 2 |
| 3. OBJECTIVES..... | 2 |
| 4. TARGET AUDIENCE..... | 3 |
| 5. GUIDANCE FOR CHILDCARE FACILITIES AND SCHOOLS ON THE PREVENTION OF THE SPREAD OF COVID-19..... | 3 |
| 5.1. Role of childcare facilities and schools in responding to COVID-19..... | 3 |
| 5.2. Stage 1: Steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in a childcare facility or school..... | 4 |
| 5.3. Management of COVID-19 Cases in a Childcare facility or School..... | 4 |
| 5.3.1. A child or learner appears ill or displaying symptoms associated with COVID-19..... | 4 |
| 5.3.2. Action to be taken when a case of COVID-19 is confirmed..... | 5 |
| 5.3.3. Action to be taken on a child/learner who may have been exposed to a suspected case of COVID-19..... | 5 |
| 5.3.4. Child/Learner who may have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19..... | 6 |
| 5.3.5. Action to be taken on a child/learner who may have been exposed to a suspected case of COVID-19..... | 6 |
| 5.4. Guidelines for Heads of Departments and Supervisors on COVID-19..... | 6 |
| 5.4.1. An employee tested positive for COVID-19..... | 6 |
| 5.4.2. An employee was exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19..... | 6 |
| 5.4.3. An employee was exposed to an unconfirmed case of COVID-19..... | 6 |
| 5.4.4. An employee appears ill and report for duty displaying symptoms associated with COVID-19..... | 7 |
| 5.4.5. An employee or employees refuse to report for duty based on the fear or being infected by COVID-19..... | 7 |
| 5.5. Management and Monitor absenteeism..... | 7 |
| 5.6. Staff members and learners who plan to travel, or have recently traveled, to areas with community spread of COVID-19..... | 7 |
| 5.7. Stage 3: Closure of a unit/component/office/department if an employee tested positive for COVID-19..... | 8 |
| 5.7.1. Considerations for closing a Department..... | 8 |
| 5.7.2. Consideration for closing a childcare facility or school..... | 8 |
| 6. HOW TO CLEAN EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS WHERE THERE WERE LEARNERS, STAFF OR OTHERS WITH SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED CASES OF COVID-19..... | 9 |
| 7. WASTE REMOVAL WITHIN THE INSTITUTION BECOME UNWELL WITH SUSPECTED COVID-19..... | 9 |
| 8. APPENDICES..... | 10 |

DRAFT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR THE CONTAINMENT/MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 FOR CHILDCARE FACILITIES, SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

1. Preamble

On 7 January 2020, Chinese scientists confirmed a cluster of pneumonia cases identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December 2019 was associated with a novel coronavirus. The virus has been named “SARS-CoV-2” and the disease it causes “coronavirus disease 2019”, or COVID-19.

As of 2 March 2020, more COVID-19 cases and deaths have been reported from 60 countries. There has been increasing concern that SARS-CoV-2 could cause the next global pandemic. The World Health Organisation’s (WHO) International Health Regulations Emergency Committee declared the outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020 and South Africa activated its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) on 31 January 2020.

With the first case confirmed on 5 March 2020 by Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize, there were a total of 240 confirmed cases with 0 deaths as of 21 March 2020. On 15 March, the first internal transmission was announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa, who declared a national state of disaster lasting for three months if not extended or cancelled, with a partial travel ban, travel advisories, discouraging public transport, the closing of schools, and prohibiting gatherings of more than 100 people.

Subsequent to this declaration the various organs of state, including the Department of Basic Education (DBE) had to quickly put drastic measures in place to avert further spread of the virus. In line with the declaration, the DBE decided to close schools earlier, on Wednesday, 18 March 2020, in accordance with the pronouncement by the President on 15 March 2020. This decision has been informed by the warnings provided by the National Institution of Communicable Diseases and WHO that have highlighted the alarming increase of infections within the country. Schools have been identified as one of the biggest threats in terms of the transmission.

The DBE further issued circulars on the Containment Guidelines and Closure of Schools to all public ordinary schools, district offices, unions, School Governing Body Associations, Provincial Education Departments and independent schools. This was followed by Statements delivered by the Minister of Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, following briefings with education stakeholders.

These Standard Operating Procedures for the Containment and Management of COVID-19 must be adhered to by all administrators in Childcare Facilities and Schools in the Education Sector.

Finally, the Standard Operating Procedures must be read in conjunction with the key and relevant legislation, policies, guidelines and frameworks.

2. Purpose of the document

These Standard Operating Procedures for the Containment and Management of COVID-19 for Childcare Facilities, Schools and School Communities provide guidelines for all administrators on the steps that need to be undertaken in order to prevent the spread and manage cases of COVID-19.

3. Objectives

The general objectives of these SOPs are to stipulate the guidelines for the provision of the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 and management of COVID-19 cases in childcare facilities and schools. Information provided seeks to:

- Help administrators of childcare facilities and primary and high schools (hereafter referred to as schools) prevent the spread of COVID-19 among learners and educators, support staff and officials in the education sector;

DRAFT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR THE CONTAINMENT/MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 FOR CHILDCARE FACILITIES, SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

- Help childcare facilities and schools to understand the protocol to be followed should a case be identified; and
- Provide considerations to help administrators plan for the continuity of teaching and learning if there is a need to quarantine learners or staff within schools or close schools as a result of the spread of COVID-19.

4. Target audience

These SOPs apply to:

- DBE (at national, provincial and district levels; school management teams (SMTs); and school-based support teams (SBSTs));
- Department of Health (DOH), (at national, provincial and district levels; and school health teams);
- Department of Social Development (DSD), (at national, provincial and district levels; childcare facilities); and
- Any other partner that is involved in or providing health and other essential services in schools.

5. Guidance for childcare facilities and schools on the prevention of the spread of COVID-19

The DBE developed guidance for children facilities and schools based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of COVID-19. Guidance will be updated as new information emerges. Please check the NICD website (www.nicd.ac.za) for updated guidance.

Schools can play an important role in efforts to control the spread of COVID-19. Schools can take steps to circulate information about the disease and its potential transmission within their school community. Schools can prepare to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among their learners and staff should health officials identify such a need.

School plans should be designed to minimize disruption to teaching and learning and protect learners and staff from social stigma and discrimination. Plans can build on everyday practices (e.g. encouraging hand hygiene, monitoring absenteeism, communicating routinely).

5.1. **Role of childcare facilities and schools in responding to COVID-19**

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) virus, and we are learning more about it every day. There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. At this point, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes it. Stopping transmission (spread) of the virus through everyday practices is the best way to keep people healthy. More information on COVID-19 is available here www.nicd.ac.za; www.health.gov.za and www.education.gov.za. Childcare facilities and schools, working together with local health departments, have an important role in slowing the spread of diseases to help ensure learners have safe and healthy learning environments.

For possible community transmission of COVID-19, the most important thing for childcare facilities and schools to do now is **plan and prepare**. As the global outbreak evolves, schools should prepare for the possibility of community-level outbreaks as well as possible recommendations from health officials for learners, staff or whole classes or grades to be quarantined at home. School dismissal could be recommended in certain circumstances. Decisions about appropriate public health interventions should always be made in discussion with public health officials who have access to all the relevant information. These decisions include i) Whether learners or educators should remain home from school for a period; and ii) Whether learners in sections of a school or a whole school should be dismissed. In this regard, daycare facilities and schools want to **be ready** if COVID-19 does appear in their communities.

5.2. Stage 1: Steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in a childcare facility or school

The Education sector supports the national efforts to fight the spread of COVID-19 by providing knowledge towards prevention, treatment, care and support of those who are infected amongst learners, educators, school support staff, parents and school communities. School administrators can take steps to help stop or slow the spread of respiratory infectious diseases, including COVID-19. Daycare facilities and schools must be COVID-19 free zones.

Because COVID-19 is a new virus, there is currently no vaccine available. However, many of the symptoms can be treated. Getting early care from a healthcare provider can make the disease less dangerous. Learners, educators, support staff and officials, parents and communities should do the following:

- Heed the directives by the President and the guidance provided by the Ministry of Health;
- Avoid public gatherings of over 100 people as the disease is spread through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person which are generated through coughing and sneezing;
- Maintain a distance of at least one meter between yourself and others.
- Avoid shaking hands;
- Wash hands frequently with water and soap. Where water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser to disinfect hands;
- Minimise touching the face (i.e. eyes, nose, mouth) with your hands. The COVID-19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours. However, simple disinfectants can kill the virus;
- Consult a health care facility if you suspect an infection of COVID-19;
- Inform the education authorities **immediately** if a learner, educator, support staff or parent/caregiver has been in direct contact with an infected person, or if they are diagnosed with COVID-19; and
- Eradicate all forms of stigma and discrimination in the Department and in schools.

Make sure that everyone in the childcare facility or school has up to date information on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (link to NICD, www.nicd.ac.za, guidance on handwashing etc.). For updates and the latest information, refer to the following resources:

- i) National Department of Health: <https://www.health.gov.za>
- ii) National Institute for Communicable Diseases: <https://www.nicd.ac.za>
- iii) National Institute of Occupational Institute: <https://www.nioh.ac.za>
- iv) World Health Organisation: <https://www.who.int>
- v) Department of Basic Education: <https://www.dbe.gov.za>
- vi) National Health Laboratory Services: <https://www.nhls.ac.za>
- vii) Corona Virus Hotline Number: 0800 02 99 99

5.3. Management of COVID-19 Cases in a Childcare facility or School

5.3.1. A child or learner appears ill or displaying symptoms associated with COVID-19

The procedures below must be followed when child/learners arrive at school and appears ill or displays symptoms associated with COVID-19. When a child/learner is suspected to be sick or displays symptoms; being high fever, respiratory distress, dry cough e.t.c at school:

- Isolate the learners and keep him or her separate from well learners and staff until they can be assessed by a health professional.
- Remember that schools are not expected to screen learners or to identify cases of COVID-19 and most respiratory illnesses are not COVID-19, therefore call the school nurse, nearest health facility or NICD toll free number or number of provincial officials provided in the DBE circular 3 of 2020.

DRAFT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR THE CONTAINMENT/MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 FOR CHILDCARE FACILITIES, SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

- The health professional will advise on further action to be taken once diagnosis is confirmed.

NB. Parents/Guardian of the learner should be informed immediately.

5.3.2. Action to be taken when a case of COVID-19 is confirmed

- The childcare or educational institution will be contacted by the relevant public health officials to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and advise on any actions or precautions that should be taken.
- If you have not yet been contacted please contact the public hotline 0800 029 999 who will refer you to the relevant contact.
- An assessment of the childcare or education institution will be undertaken by the public health officials with relevant staff. Advice on the management of pupils or learners and staff will be based on this assessment.
- If there is a confirmed case, a risk assessment will be undertaken by the educational establishment with advice from the public health officials.
- In most cases, closure of the facility or school will be unnecessary. This decision will be facility or school specific, based on various factors such as establishment size and pupil mixing.

5.3.3. Action to be taken on a child/learner who may have been exposed to a suspected case of COVID-19

- If a child/learner has been in contact with a suspected case in a childcare facility or school, no restrictions or special control measures are required while laboratory test results for COVID-19 are awaited.
- There is no need to close the institution or send other children/learners or staff home.
- As a precautionary measure, the NICD are currently testing a very large number of people who have travelled back from affected countries, the vast majority of whom test negative.
- Therefore, until the outcome of test results is known there is no action that staff members need to take.

5.3.4. Child/Learner who may have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19.

- All close contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 case are required to stay at home for 14 days while being monitored for symptoms. They may not attend school.
- Learners who are not contacts of a confirmed case should attend school. Family and friends who have not had close contact with the original confirmed case do not need to take any precautions or make any changes to their own activities such as attending childcare or educational settings or work, unless they become unwell.
- Specifically, learners who have interacted with a healthy contact of a confirmed case should not be excluded from school. The reason for this is that asymptomatic spread of COVID-19, if it occurs is likely very uncommon, meaning: for a person who comes into contact with a healthy contact of a case, it is very unlikely to result in transmission.
- All case contacts who become symptomatic will be immediately screened for COVID-19 and if found to be a case, active contact tracing and self-quarantine of all contacts will be implemented.

NB. Keeping learners at home from school or closing schools is a serious decision which may restrict the learners' ability to acquire education and have knock-on effects in terms of the need for childcare. All decisions for learners to stay home from school based on possible exposure to or infection with COVID-19 should be justified by available scientific evidence.

5.4. Guidelines for Heads of Departments and Supervisors on COVID-19: Procedure regarding employees

The public service is the largest employer in the country and has the legal obligation in accordance with Section 8, of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) 1993, as amended to, where reasonably practicable, provide and maintain a safe, health work environment that is without risk to employees

Regulation 53 provides that the Head of Department shall establish and maintain a safe and healthy work environment for employees of the department and a safe and healthy service delivery environment for members of the public service regulation.

Given the ability to rapidly spread, the management of confirmed and suspected COVID-19 cases is of paramount importance. In this regard by Head of Departments for the following scenarios, the following guidelines must be observed as minimum:

5.4.1. An employee tested positive for COVID-19

- The Head of Department should formally grant approval for sick leave in accordance with the Determination and Directive on Leave of Absence in the Public Service or incapacity Leave and Ill-health Retirement processes if the employee has exhausted his/her normal sick leave.
- The Head of Department should formally grant approval in accordance with Public Service Regulation 51 for all employees who worked closely with the affected employee to self-quarantine for a period of 14 days to ensure the infection does not spread. This must be done with the relevant authorities of and National Department of Health (NDoH) protocols. Such employees must be kept and submitted to the DPSA.
- The clearing/disinfection of the affected workspace must be facilitated. Contact must be maintained with such employees as a means of monitoring and evaluation.
- Report the cases in the required format to the DPSA via the dedicated email address COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.

5.4.2. An employee was exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19

- In terms of the NDoH's guidelines all those employees who were in contact with the infected person are required to self-quarantine at home for a period of 14 days or for a duration as prescribed by the NDoH while being monitored for symptoms.
- The Head of Department should formally grant approval in accordance with Public Service Regulation 51 for employee to self-quarantine for a period of 14 days or as prescribed by NDoH to ensure the infection does not spread. This must be done in consultation with the relevant authorities. Such employees can be requested to work remotely.
- The HoD must ensure that the affected workplace/s are cleaned/disinfected.
- Contact must be maintained with such employee as a means of monitoring and evaluation.
- Report the cases in the required format to the DPSA via the dedicated email address COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.

5.4.3. An employee was exposed to an unconfirmed case of COVID-19

- If an employee has been in contact with a person who has not yet been confirmed as infected by COVID-19 while laboratory test results for COVID-19 are awaited. Until the outcomes of test results is known the Head of Department can decide, inform and guided by NDoH, Legal Services and Human Resources if restrictions or special control measures need to be applied until the results are known.
- Once the results are known, protocol by NDoH are effected, if applicable.

DRAFT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR THE CONTAINMENT/MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 FOR CHILDCARE FACILITIES, SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

- Report the cases in the required format to the DPSA via the dedicated email address COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za

5.4.4. An employee ***appears ill*** and report for duty ***displaying symptoms*** associated with COVID-19.

- If an employee presents themselves at work with similar symptoms consistent with COVID-19; being high fever, respiratory distress, dry cough etc.. they must be advised to contact the hotline, consult a medical professional and follow the NDoH protocol for COVID-19.
- The employee should be temporarily isolated in a sickbay or room identified for temporary isolation while arrangements are made for them to be transported to a medical facility. Employees must be encouraged to seek medical attention if they display flu like symptoms and to not report for duty.
- Further actions should be taken once confirmation of diagnosis of a medical professional has been confirmed.
- Report the cases in the required format to the DPSA via the dedicated email address COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.

5.4.5. An employee or employees refuse to report for duty based on the fear or being infected by COVID-19.

- The employment relationship is the legal link between employers and employees and stipulate that a person (employee) will perform work or a service under certain conditions in return for remuneration (employer).
- The onus is on the employee/s to demonstrate that the workplace is a risk and unsafe in relationship to the virus.
- Refusal to report for duty, contrary to the instructions of the supervisor or HOD means that such absence is unpaid and should be dealt with in terms of the Disciplinary Code.

5.5. Management and Monitoring of absenteeism

- Review attendance and sick leave policies. Encourage learners and staff (**educator and support staff**) to stay home when sick. Use flexibility, when possible, to allow staff to stay home to care for sick family members.
- Discourage the use of perfect attendance awards and incentives as these may encourage people to come to school sick.
- Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff.
- Determine what level of absenteeism will disrupt continuity of teaching and learning.

5.6. Staff members and learners who plan to travel, or have recently traveled, to areas with community spread of COVID-19.

- South Africa has implemented specific travel restrictions to countries with high COVID-19 incidences. While the risks of contracting COVID-19 infection are generally low and the consequences in most cases are mild, there are other associated risks of international travel. This includes cancelled flights, new travel restrictions and/or airport closures and possible quarantine in the event you come into contact with a suspected case. The risk of travel disruptions or acquiring COVID-19 in a foreign location varies by location and the risk situation is rapidly evolving. It is not possible to predict the level of risk in any location in the future.
- If members of school communities become infected during travel, they could potentially introduce COVID-19 into the community on return.

DRAFT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR THE CONTAINMENT/MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 FOR CHILDCARE FACILITIES, SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

- The NICD has developed guidance on quarantine including guidance on appropriate precautions to take when returning from travel in affected countries and these should be followed (www.nicd.ac.za). In light of this, staff and learners who will be travelling internationally (including school tours) in the next months should reconsider the benefits and risks of undertaking such travel.
- Schools may need to postpone or cancel trips that could expose learners and staff to potential community spread of COVID-19. Learners returning from travel to areas with community spread of COVID-19 must follow guidance on the NICD website. **Schools can also consult with local health officials or call the NICD community hotline to discuss travel concerns 0800 029 999.**

5.7. Stage 3: Closure of a unit/component/office/department if an employee tested positive for COVID-19

Preparing for possible closure of an education institution should only be considered following recommendations from a public health official. Temporarily closing an institution or schools is a possible strategy to stop or slow the further spread of COVID-19 in communities. School administrators should work in close collaboration and coordination with health officials to make dismissal and large event cancellation decisions. Departments and Schools are not expected to make decisions about dismissal or canceling events on their own. Schools can seek specific guidance from health officials to determine if, when, and for how long to take these steps. Large event cancellations or school dismissals may be recommended for 14 days, or possibly longer if advised by local health officials and the DBE. The nature of these actions (e.g., scope, duration) may change as the local situation evolves.

5.7.1. Considerations for closing a Department

- Report the exposure to the NDoH
- The Department must contact the relevant health official to discuss the case, identify people who have been exposed and advise on any occurrence based on this assessment
- An assessment of the institution will be conducted by the public health official and advice on the management of the occurrence based on this assessment
- The assessment decision to close a unit/component(s) in the institution is the prerogative of the Head of Department and will be based on the advice of the public health official.
- The closure of unit/component(s) in the institution must be considered with due regard to the extent of the exposure and its implication on health and safety including service delivery needs of the department.
- Report the cases in the required format to the DPSA via the dedicated email address COVID-19@dpsa.gov.za.

5.7.2. Consideration for closing a childcare facility or school

During school dismissals, childcare programs and schools may stay open for staff members (unless ill) while learners stay home. Keeping facilities open will allow educators to develop and deliver lessons and materials remotely, thus maintaining continuity of teaching and learning. Furthermore, it would allow other staff members to continue to provide services and help with additional response efforts.

If schools are dismissed, schools can consider the following steps:

- **Temporarily cancel extracurricular group activities and large events.**
 - Cancel or postpone events such as field trips, and sporting events.
- **Discourage learners and staff from gathering or socializing anywhere.**

DRAFT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR THE CONTAINMENT/MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 FOR CHILDCARE FACILITIES, SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

- Discourage gatherings at places like a friend's house, a favourite restaurant, or the local shopping mall.
- **Ensure continuity of education.**
- Review continuity plans, including plans for the continuity of teaching and learning. Implement e-learning plans, including digital and distance learning options as feasible and appropriate.
- If necessary, determine, in consultation with school district officials or other relevant state or local partners:
 - How to convert face-to-face lessons into online lessons and how to train educators to do so;
 - How to triage technical issues if faced with limited IT support and staff;
 - How to encourage appropriate adult supervision while learners are using distance learning approaches; and
 - How to deal with the potential lack of learners' access to computers and the Internet at home.
- **Ensure continuity of meal programmes, if applicable.**
- Consider ways to distribute food to learners through the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP); and
- If there is community spread of COVID-19, design strategies to avoid distribution in settings where people might gather in a group or crowd. Consider options such as "grab-and-go" bagged lunches or meal delivery.

6. How to clean educational establishments where there were learners, staff or others with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Coronavirus symptoms are similar to a flu-like illness and include cough, fever, or shortness of breath. Once symptomatic, all surfaces that the suspected case has come into contact with must be cleaned using disposable cloths and household detergents. These include:

- all surfaces and objects which are visibly contaminated with body fluids; and
- all potentially contaminated high-contact areas such as toilets, door handles, telephones.

Public areas where a symptomatic individual has passed through and spent minimal time in (such as corridors) but which are not visibly contaminated with body fluids do not need to be specially cleaned and disinfected. If a person becomes ill in a shared space, these should be cleaned as detailed above.

7. Waste removal within the institution become unwell with suspected COVID-19

All waste that has been in contact with the individual, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full. The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied. It can then be put in the normal waste.

8. Communication plans for use with the school community.

- Include strategies for sharing information with staff, learners, and their families.
- Include information about steps being taken by the school or childcare facility to prepare, and how additional information will be shared.

School administrators can also support their school community by sharing resources with staff, families and, age-appropriately, with learners. Consider sharing the following fact sheets and information sources found on the NICD website www.nicd.ac.za and the DBE website www.education.gov.za such as the Frequently asked Questions on COVID-19.

**DRAFT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR THE CONTAINMENT/MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 FOR
CHILDCARE FACILITIES, SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITIES**

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| KwaZulu-Natal | Premi Govender | premi.govender@kznhealth.gov.za | 071 609 2505 |
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| Central Region (Gauteng, Free State, Northern Cape) | Funeka Bongweni | Funeka.Bongweni@health.gov.za | 012 395 9728 060 993 0107 |
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It is imperative that school communities are aware of the basic health and safety precautions as mentioned throughout the circular. This circular must be implemented immediately within all South African schools and applies to all entities and individuals that may come within the school premises.

Provincial Education Departments are obliged to ensure compliance as well as secure resources to protect the health of school communities.