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சுகாதார மற்றும் சுதேசவைத்தியச் சேவைகள் அமைச்சு
Ministry of Health and Indigenous Medical Services

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All Regional Directors of Health Services,
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All Medical Officers of Health,
All School Medical Officers,

**Guidance for Preparedness and Response for COVID-19 outbreak in the School setting
2020 April 27**

This interim guide has been prepared based on the currently available evidence on Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). All schools in Sri Lanka were closed on 12th March 2020 in response to the outbreak, which is considered a very timely action that was taken together with subsequent lock down of the country. The guideline is issued at a point when the country has considered relaxation of imposed curfew with an attempt to resume normalcy in the country.

The Ministry of Health strongly advocates that physical distancing with other hygienic measures of hand washing, sanitation, respiratory hygiene are the mainstay in prevention of spread of the virus and currently all avoidable large movements and mixing of people should be curtailed. Essential services are also advocated under controlled risk reduction measures.

The current pandemic status or the country situation does not warrant re-opening of schools. The timing of re-opening should only be decided after considering the epidemiological situation and the level of preparedness within schools for minimizing of risk.

It is strongly advised that the Ministry of Education and all other private schools make use of this period for preparedness and have all the facilities required including infrastructure for control and prevention of COVID-19 infection, before starting the schools. At no time should there be a compromise on preparedness to recommence schools.

In the eventual announcement of reopening, if any school has been used as a quarantine place, those places should be disinfected and at least kept closed for three days before re-opening for students. Further, routine dengue control measures need to be continued.

The purpose of this guideline is to make all school authorities to implement the preparedness plan, as outlined below.

1. Upon clearance given from the central Ministry of Health, the local decision of re-opening of schools in the Provinces/ districts can be decided by a Provincial Committee comprising of Provincial Director of Health Services (PDHS), Provincial Director of Education (PDE) Regional Directors of Health services (RDHS), District Secretaries, and other relevant officials. This decision should be taken after careful evaluation of the local scenario, carried out by health, education, police and tri-forces, social service and transport authorities.
2. Re-opening of schools, should be done in a phased out manner on incremental basis with caution.
3. This Provincial committee has to decide on **(in line with national level decisions)**
 - a. which schools to open,
 - b. when to open the schools
 - c. which grades in which schools to open
 - d. closing times for each grades – facilitating minimum crowding at the gates
 - e. number of days and days of the week schools will be opened.
 - f. Procedure to follow in the case of any closure of schools (any worsening of outbreak /etc)
4. Initially plan to start selected number of schools in low risk areas, that can be manageable. Schools with adequate hand washing facilities, adequate space to keep 1 meter distance between students, and with adequate monitoring work force (school staff / health staff) can be prioritized (refer Annex I- Country map showing the risk levels).
5. Consider opening of schools with Grade 10, 11, 12 & 13 initially, after considering the level of compliance for preventive measures
6. Decide on the number of school opening days per week and the number of students at school per day. This can be decided based on the number of students per class to maintain one meter physical distance between students and staff
7. Ensure the schools to have adequate facilities to maintain hand hygiene and maintain one meter physical distance between students before opening schools.
8. Assess the school situation daily, during the first week by Education officials. (using the given checklist). Then assess once a week with a team comprising of both health and education officials during the initial 1 month. Then as per the frequency of monitoring decided by the Provincial Committee, based on the country's COVID-19 situation.
9. Schools should communicate with the area Medial Officer of Health regarding the implementation progress/any issues arising related to infection prevention and control (IPC).
10. The Provincial Committee should meet monthly /as needed and decide on maintenance of the current schools with current grades or incrementally open the other schools/ grades on a gradual basis.
11. Update or develop school emergency and contingency plans.
12. Cancel all events/meetings/ exhibitions/ sports festivals that usually take place on school premises until further notice.

13. A separate place or room needs to be identified to place /isolate a student/staff member who is identified with COVID-19 suspected symptoms, until sending them home or to a healthcare facility
14. Continued access to quality education using appropriate technology should be supported in the case of absenteeism/sick leave or temporary school closures.

The Ministry of Health will give clearance on the date to re-open the schools, only after careful assessment of the situation on preparedness of schools and the country spread of the disease, with the relevant experts.

The conditions to be met and the student compliance that is essential should be communicated with all concerned including students and parents well in advance of reopening upon clearance given by Ministry of Health. A guideline has been issued with similar contents to the Ministry of Education as well.

The content of this guide should be communicated to the relevant authorities. In preparation of the schools for COVID-19 prevention, public health authorities should work coordinating with the education sector.

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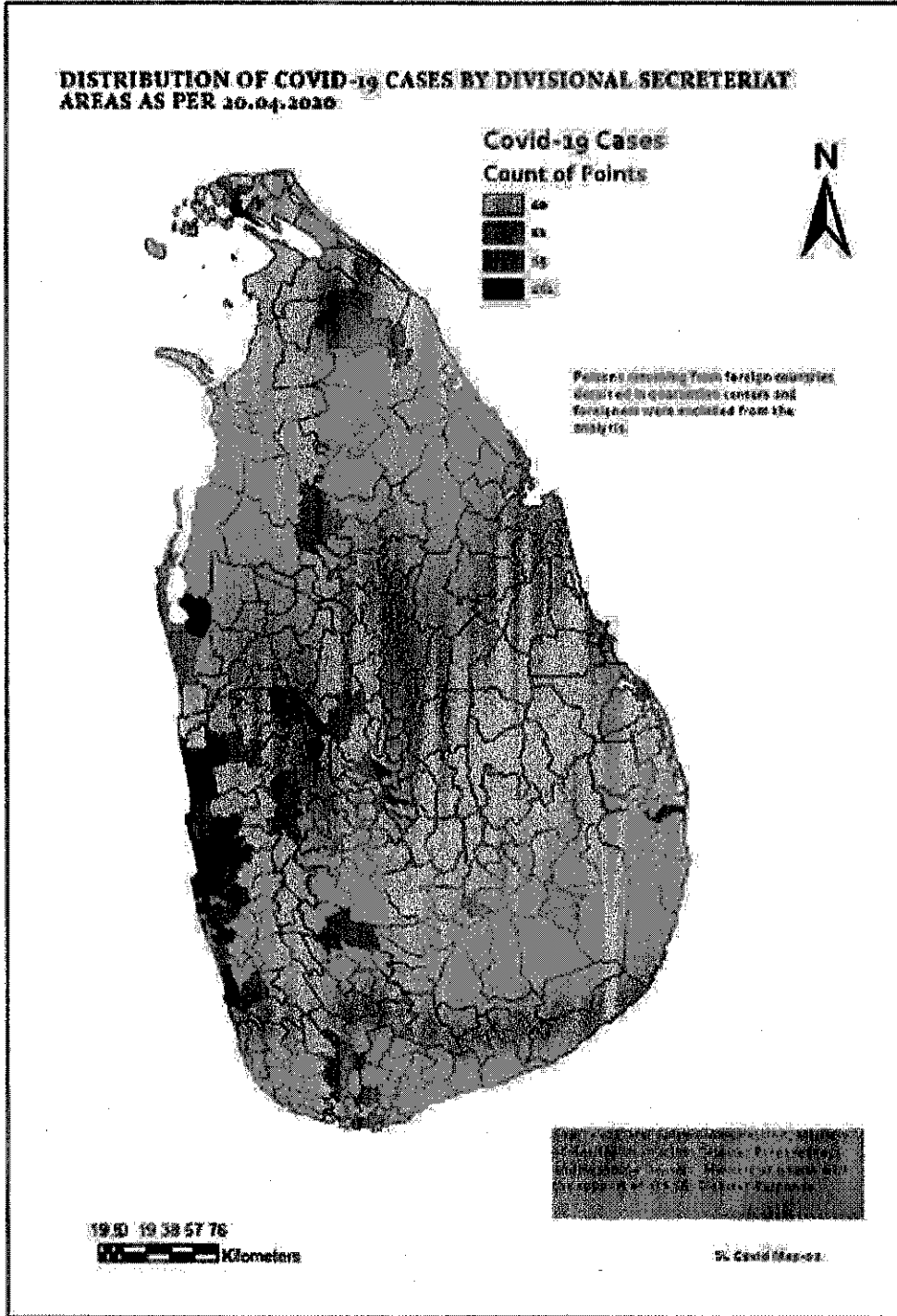
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President/Sri Lanka College of Community Physicians,
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Annex I

The Sri Lanka country map showing the risk areas as at 2020 April 20

(Please refer “<http://www.epid.gov.lk>” for COVID-19 daily situation report and “<http://www.hpb.health.gov.lk>” for further information which is updated daily).



Measures to be taken for the prevention of COVID 19 infection

A. Safe school operations and maintaining Infection Prevention and Control measures

Special considerations on eligibility of persons to attend school

1. Any student / staff /nonacademic staff with COVID like symptoms (Fever, cough, shortness of breath , runny nose) should be strongly advised to avoid attending to school
2. For children with special needs, can be allowed to come to school if the teacher and an assistant are available,.
3. Children with immune-compromised diseases and who are on immune-compromising medication should not attend school until further notice

Following basic principles can help keep students, teachers, and staff safe at school and help stop the spread of this disease.

1. At the gate, there should be a person to screen students and other staff entering the school (eg: verbally ask for relevant symptoms and any if person is having such symptoms isolate them until steps are taken to send them home)
2. Schools should establish and enforce regular hand washing with safe water and soap. Facilities to be established at the entrance to the school (near the gate) for hand washing with adequate facilities avoiding overcrowding. establish hand washing facilities in or near class rooms and at the toilets
3. Every person should wear a mask during travelling to and from school and within school premises
4. Clean and disinfect school buildings, classrooms /floors at least once a day, before beginning of school work.
5. Surfaces that are frequently touched by many people, should be disinfected twice daily: before starting of the school and after three hours of starting of the school (eg: railings, lunch tables, door and window handles, toys, teaching and learning aids and toilets etc.) (Annex IV).
6. Maintain a database of all the personnel at school with their contact details (eg: teachers, students, other staff members)
7. Educate the parents and students on prevention of COVID-19. Display health education messages in the school. Clear communication to parents and children should be issued on Dos and Don'ts. This can include a guide on how to make your own face mask at home.
8. Logistic management (Eg:, soap, masks-ensure all logistics are available)
9. Keep common doors opened (eg: class room, main door to toilet) to minimize touching.
10. Students or staff members should avoid sharing of school stationary, and text books, meals or drinks.
11. Students should bring their own lunch box and water bottle. Students should not drink water directly from the tap. (i.e. mouth to tap. They can refill their own container)
12. Waste disposal- there should be waste bins with a lid to put infected waste and should be safely disposed (burnt in a separate place).

13. At the start of the school, delivery of health messages can be made as announcements. (Positive and simple messages reminding the best practices to prevent COVID-19, how to have a healthy life style specially strengthening psychosocial wellbeing-yoga, mindfulness).
14. Aware the students on IPC practices at home: After returning home from school, before entering home – should wash hands properly with soap and water and, remove shoes outside. Keep the school bag in a separate place in the house and if possible wipe the outer surface of the bag with a soap soaked cloth (not in the bed room or living room), wash the clothes and have a bath if possible before entering the home or immediately after entering the home.

B. Implement Physical Distancing practices

1. Maintain physical distance of one meter or more among students and also among others at ALL times and at ALL places including assemblies, class rooms, playground, common places, toilets, etc.
2. Avoid usual gathering of children at the beginning and end of the school
3. Stagger lunch times, break times, and the movement of pupils around the school, to reduce large groups of gathering. Stagger closing time with 15 minutes apart to prevent crowding at school gates.
4. Assemblies can be held to give the important messages to students/staff members if the physical distancing of one meter and other preventive measures can be adopted.
5. Avoid all unnecessary staff gatherings /meetings / trainings.
6. Sports that involve shared play equipment, with close physical contacts and which can disrupt physical distancing should be avoided.
7. Exercises that can be done with maintaining one meter physical distancing should be encouraged.
8. Arrange and put up signage to show the walking directions to arrange the flow of students in a unidirectional manner– to minimize physical contact of each other with bi directional flow. (ie: putting guidelines on the floor in corridors/ stairways).
9. Discourage parents from gathering at school gates

C. If a student / staff member gets sick during school hours

1. Establish procedures if students or staff found to have symptoms of COVID-19 infection- inform the relevant MOH and area PHI, the family members of the student or staff member
2. Communicate the plans to local health authorities (Relevant MOH and area PHI)
3. Update emergency contact lists and make those visible to all.
4. Ensure a procedure for separating sick students and staff from those who are well – **without creating stigma. Show empathy and kind approach.**
5. If the sick person is having fever, sore throat, difficulty in breathing or other symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 like illness, - should wear a mask immediately if not already wearing one.
6. If an emergency call the ambulance. The Student/staff may need to be referred directly to a health facility, depending on the situation/context, or sent home.

D. Routine School Health Services

1. Postpone school medical inspections until further notice.
2. Regarding the dental clinics, all dental procedures should not be conducted until further notice.
3. Health education messages including proper diet, physical activity, psychosocial health promotion, dental hygiene, etc should be promoted.

E. Psychosocial support needs

It should be understood that student can behave indifferently due to current stressful situation. It is normal to feel differently. Convince children that life has ups and downs. Even if we are psychologically down now, we can return to normal soon.

1. Do not discriminate the students/ bully when their family members are affected by COVID-19.
2. Encourage children to discuss their questions and concerns.
3. Explain it is normal that they may experience different reactions and encourage them to talk to teachers if they have any questions or concerns.
4. Provide information in an honest, age-appropriate manner.
5. Involvement of counseling teacher when needed.
6. Guide students on how to support their peers and prevent exclusion and bullying.
7. Encourage the teachers to maintain their personal health and wellbeing
8. Work with MOH and staff/ teachers to identify and support students and staff who exhibit signs of distress.
9. Publicize help lines via text messages/ notices/ notice boards: Mental health help line - 1926 / Health Promotion Bureau - 1999
10. Regular health promotion activities to be promoted; exercises, yoga, mindfulness practice, recreational activities like arts, dancing and music while maintaining the physical distance.
11. Children should be allowed to share their experience with others.
12. If any person shows signs of stress/distress, refer to MOH/MO-MH.
13. The signs of stress/distress presented in Annex V.
14. Child protection and security to be ensured. (helpline - 1929).

F. Instructions for Hostels in Schools

The school principal should liaise with MOH / PHI in planning of reopening and functioning of the hostel. All COVID-19 prevention measures to be implemented within the hostel.

G. Instructions for Cafeterias in Schools

1. It is not recommended to open the school cafeteria at this stage. Children should bring food from home. If there are students who face difficulty to bring their own food from home measures to be taken to provide them food in liaising with the Divisional Secretary.
2. Those who received the mid-day meal from school can be given a dry ration until school authorities commence the mid-day meal programme.

H. Instructions for School vans /School Buses

1. While using transport facilities all should adhere to the physical distancing measures and with minimum touching of the surfaces of the vehicle.

2. The students/teachers should wear masks and practice proper hand washing practices.
3. All van/bus drivers should be notified that if they are having respiratory symptoms should stay at home and inform the school authority.
4. School vans and buses should be disinfected every day before loading the students

I. Responsibilities of Parents /Caregivers

COVID-19 is a new virus and new knowledge is still being gathered about how it affects children. It is possible for people of any age to be infected with the virus, but so far there have been relatively few cases of COVID-19 reported among children. However, knowledge on whether children acts as carriers is still sparse. Parents and care-givers should pay attention to the following.

1. Recognize the symptoms of COVID-19 (coughing, fever, shortness of breath) in your child
2. Seek medical advice by first calling your health facility/1390 and then follow the medical advice
3. Remember that symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough or fever can be similar to those of the flu, or the common cold, which are a lot more common.
4. If your child is sick, keep them home and notify the school of your child's absence and symptoms.
5. Explain to your child what is happening in simple words and reassure them that they are safe.
6. Teach them good hand and respiratory hygiene practices for school and elsewhere,
 - a) frequent hand washing (Annex VI),
 - b) covering a cough or sneeze with a flexed elbow or tissue, then throwing away the tissue into a closed lined bin and washing hands properly (Annex VII).
 - c) not to touch their mouth, eyes and nose (MEN).
7. Home made food is strongly advised. since canteens will not be functioning
8. All personal items sent to school should be labeled to avoid sharing.
9. Children coming to school with parents, should be accompanied by only one person (mother/father/guardian).

J. Responsibilities of Students

Children should be knowledgeable regarding age appropriate information on COVID-19 disease; its symptoms, how the disease is transmitted from one person to another, methods of prevention and the importance of prevention. And it is very important to get the facts from reliable sources and to be safe from incorrect information and myths.

1. Students should understand their responsibility in taking preventive measures advised by the health and school authorities.
2. Stay at home, if feeling sick, having respiratory symptoms or fever.
3. This is a temporary situation faced by the entire world and should understand even if you are psychologically down now, can come back to normal soon.
4. Do not tease or stigmatize anyone with disease or suspected of having disease.

CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS AND STAFF

		Check
1.	<p>Before school opens, verify the availability of the below</p> <p>a) Running water and soap are available for hand washing for students, staff and other staff (security, etc)- at least 1 tap should be available for 50 students</p> <p>b) Availability of age appropriate washing stations</p> <p>c) Adequate number of lined bins (ideally pedal operated lined bins) with a lid should be available at least one per class to put used tissues</p> <p>d) Posters / notices have been put up to aware the students / staff on respiratory etiquette, hand washing and physical distancing</p> <p>e) Preparedness plan available on what to do if a student/ staff becomes ill during school hours</p> <p>f) Separate isolation room (preferably with an attached bathroom) is identified to temporary isolate the ill student/ staff till the transport/ ambulance is available</p> <p>g) Adequate stock of masks are available to be used in a case of emergency</p> <p>h) Adequate masks, gloves are available for cleaning staff</p> <p>i) Adequate amount of disinfections / bleach is available for disinfecting toilets/ classes/ frequently used places and surfaces</p>	
2.	<p>Promote and demonstrate regular hand washing and positive hygiene behaviors and monitor their uptake</p> <p>a) Availability of clean and separate toilets for girls and boys</p> <p>b) Availability of soap and safe water at age-appropriate hand washing stations</p> <p>c) Frequent and thorough washing</p>	
3.	<p>Clean and disinfect school buildings, classrooms and especially water and sanitation facilities at least twice a day,</p> <p>a) particularly surfaces that are touched by many people (railings, lunch tables, sports equipment, door and window handles, toys, teaching and learning aids etc.) minimally twice a day</p> <p>b) Use sodium hypochlorite at 0.5% (equivalent 5000ppm) for disinfecting surfaces & 70% ethyl alcohol for disinfection of small items</p> <p>c) Availability of appropriate equipment for cleaning staff</p>	
4.	<p>Increase air flow and ventilation where climate allows (open windows, switch on a fan to blow the wind in one direction.</p>	
5.	<p>Post signs encouraging good hand and respiratory hygiene practices and physical distancing</p>	
6.	<p>Ensure trash is removed daily and disposed of safely</p>	
7.	<p>Minimize individual communication and use public speaking systems /written notices to convey essential messages</p>	

Key facts about COVID-19

➤ **What is COVID-19**

COVID-19 is a disease that is caused by a newly identified strain of virus. Previously this virus was called as “2019 novel coronavirus” of “2019-nCoV”. COVID-19 virus is from the same family of viruses that causes Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold.

➤ **How does COVID-19 is transmitted?**

The virus can be transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing) and by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and touching their face (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth). The virus can survive on surfaces for several hours.

➤ **Symptoms of COVID-19**

The infected individuals can have symptoms that can be seen in any acute respiratory tract infection (fever, sore-throat, cold, cough, shortness of breath, etc.). Some people may be asymptomatic. Some can develop severe infection with pneumonia, breathing difficulties, kidney failure or even death.

➤ **Who is at most risk?**

Elderly people, people with chronic medical conditions (diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, etc.), people who are having immune-compromising illness (cancer) or who are on long term immune-compromising drugs (eg: prednisolone) can develop severe disease. So far relatively few cases are reported among children. This is a new virus and we are still learning about how it affects children.

➤ **How can a COVID-19 infected person identified?**

Currently, the virus is identified by conducting a PCR test in certain laboratories by testing the respiratory secretions.

➤ **Is there a treatment for COVID-19**

There is no currently available vaccine or a definitive therapy and several studies are ongoing. However many symptoms can be treated and it is important to seek medical advice early.

➤ **How can this disease be prevented?**

The transmission of COVID-19 can be prevented by adopting certain public health measures.

- By staying at home, not coming to public places when you have acute respiratory symptoms and to seek medical advice early.

- By maintaining proper hand hygiene (washing hands often with soap and water).
- Maintaining respiratory etiquette (covering mouth and nose with flexed elbow/tissue or a clean cloth when coughing and sneezing, dispose of used tissue immediately to a closed bin).
- Cleaning frequently touched surfaces and objects with suitable disinfectant.
- Maintaining physical distance of 1 meter or more between individuals. Should avoid unnecessary gatherings.
- Properly cook meat and fish prior to consumption.
- If you work with animals or in animal farms, should stay away from sick animals. Should not consume dead animals.

Since we are still learning more about COVID-19, public health officials may recommend additional actions.

Annex IV

Disinfection and cleaning of surfaces that is subjected to contamination by frequent touching

Clean and disinfect particularly surfaces that are touched by many people, before starting of the school and after three hours of starting of the school (eg: railings, lunch tables, sports equipment, door and window handles, toys, teaching and learning aids etc.)

1. Surface cleaning in sick room/separate isolation room

- Door knobs/window handles – wipe with 70% Ethyl alcohol
- Other metal surfaces - wipe with 70% Ethyl alcohol
- Non metal surfaces -Hypochlorite at 0.1% (equivalent 1000ppm)

2. Surfaces that are touched frequently

- Railings/lunch tables – 70% Ethyl alcohol
- Teaching and learning aids - 70% Ethyl alcohol

3. Reusable dedicated equipment (eg: thermometers)

- 70% Ethyl alcohol

4. Toilets

- Hypochlorite at 0.5%

5. Cleaning equipments (mops/dust pan)

- Hypochlorite at 0.5%

6. Infectious waste

- Burning in a separate place

Annex V

How to identify the signs of stress/distress in children

- Lack of interest in things which they like to do
- Lack of sleep / increased sleeping time
- Behavioural problems / aggression and violence
- Lack of self esteem
- Poor memory
- Poor concentration ability
- Somatic symptoms – change of appetite, headache
- Irritability
- Behaving like a small child
- Being oppositional and disobedient

Annex VI

Proper Hand Washing

Step 1: Wet hands with running water

Step 2: Apply enough soap to cover wet hands

Step 3: Scrub all surfaces of the hands – including backs of hands, between fingers and under nails – for at least 20 seconds

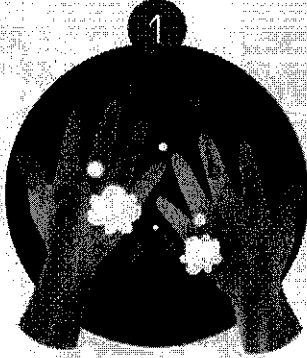
Step 4: Rinse thoroughly with running water

Step 5: Dry hands with a clean, dry cloth, single-use towel / handkerchief

Wash your hands often,

1. at the point of entering the school/class
2. especially before and after eating;
3. after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing;
4. going to the bathroom/ toilets/latrines
5. whenever your hands are visibly dirty
6. before going to the class room and before leaving the school
7. before entering home

WASH YOUR HANDS



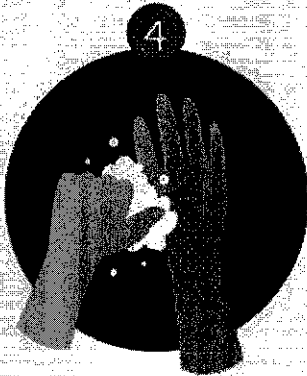
1
WATER AND SOAP



2
PALM TO PALM



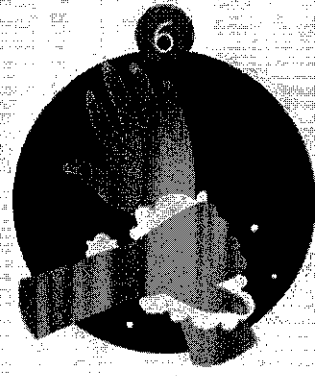
3
BETWEEN FINGERS



4
FOCUS ON THUMBS



5
BACK OF HANDS



6
FOCUS ON WHISTS

Coughing and sneezing etiquette

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue.

Dispose of your tissue properly.

If there is no tissue, cough or sneeze into the bend of elbow – not your hand.

If you sneeze or cough into hand, wash your hands as soon as possible.

Source: US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

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