

# Joint Message on School Health and Nutrition in the context of the COVID-19 in Eastern and Southern Africa

## Background

As a mitigation measure against the COVID-19 pandemic, 199 countries globally have undertaken school closures, which keeps over 1.6 billion children out of school (91% of total enrolled learners) as of 20 April 2020. In Eastern and Southern Africa, 24 countries\* covered by UNICEF and/or WFP have undergone country-wide school closures. This leaves at least 120 million children and youth in the region not able to attend school (preprimary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary). This will have a negative impact not only on children’s right to education but also on other human rights including the right to food as well as other related risks (e.g. increased protection risks). More than 16 million affected school-children in the region rely on school meals and nutrition services: either it’s the only meal they consume in the day or it contributes a significant part of their daily nutrient requirements. Although it is difficult to predict how long school closures will last, health specialists argue that it might become a prolonged crisis, therefore it is crucial that governments take immediate measure to prioritize the provision of healthy and nutritious food for children in two different cases: where schools remain closed and schools re-open.

\*Total number of countries covered by WFP and/or UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa regional office (17 countries are commonly covered)



### School Closure

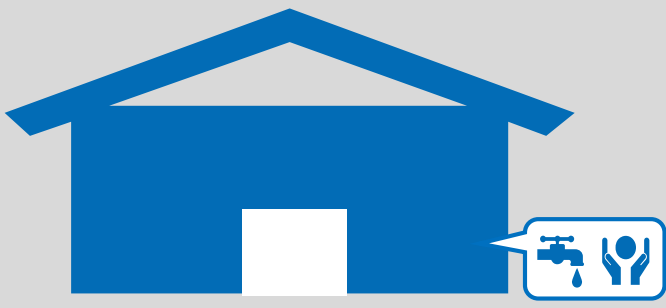
- Maintain flexibility and responsiveness to changing conditions for supply and distribution of food and provision of nutrition services, while ensuring compliance with COVID-19 protocols.
- Ensure that the most vulnerable groups are prioritized for nutrition/ food assistance such as preprimary children in Early Childhood Centers.
- 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 school re-opening.

**Examples** of alternative modalities to on-site meals: take home rations, cash/vouchers, home deliveries (incl. non-traditional partner; postal service), etc.



### School Opening








- Refer to guidance of [Framework for Reopening of School](#) and adapt locally.
- Promote optimal water, sanitation and hygiene services and ensure optimal hygiene and other key behaviors of children, teachers and foodservice staff/volunteers, school canteens and regulation of food vendors.
- Ensure and continue the provision of comprehensive school health and nutrition package.
- Avoid potential deterioration in food safety and quality standards.
- Ensure meal’s adequate nutrition content to safeguard immunity of the school children.
- Create contingency plans for the distribution of school meals using alternative modalities in the event that the schools close again.



## ➔ Who will use this document and how

- Governments  
Based on the areas for consideration for school closures and re-opening and the key messages provided in this joint statement, government can leverage this document to lead assessments, planning, implementation and system strengthening for risk-informed and resilient school health and nutrition programmes in response to COVID-19.
- WFP and UNICEF Country Offices  
Use the principles of engagement outlined in this joint message to coordinate joint support to government's and partners in Eastern and Southern Africa to take immediate actions and advocate for long-lasting and sustainable change in safe school environments.

### Key message for System Strengthening

-  Facilitate multi-level participatory risk-assessment for school closure/opening.
-  Develop contingency planning, ensuring involvement of communities and school committees.
-  Maintain the specific budget allocated for contingency plan implementation.
-  Multi-sectoral coordination with traditional and non-traditional partners (e.g. private sectors).
-  Develop/implement "Opening up Better School" campaign and catch-up programme.
-  Prepare for Build Back Better to improve school environments & school feeding programme.
-  Try out innovative approaches, monitor the progress and generate evidence.

## WFP/UNICEF Joint Regional Collaboration Efforts

- ✓ Joint programme development and fundraising efforts on School Health and Nutrition.
- ✓ Mobilization and sensitization for the "back to learning campaigns" in the region.
- ✓ Development of information, education and communication materials on COVID prevention and control measures.
- ✓ Social behavior change communication processes.
- ✓ Joint advocacy and fundraising for safe schools with improved WASH facilities as much as possible.
- ✓ Commitment to enhancing knowledge sharing across Eastern and Southern Africa, and compilation of lessons learned and case studies on best practices to build the resilience of the region for the current response and future pandemics.
- ✓ Engage private sector to explore innovative and non-traditional approaches to support the continued provision of school meals.
- ✓ Joint evaluation and research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on school health and nutrition programmes in the region.

**WFP** works to ensure that schoolchildren and their families continue to receive support that addresses their food and nutrition requirements during the COVID-19 and provides analysis and technical support to governments for the design and implementation of broader national emergency and social protection responses.

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**UNICEF** works to support women and children, including those in humanitarian settings, to have continued access to essential service. This includes receiving some form of learning support during school closure due to the COVID-19, and all children who were in school return safely with adequate nutrition, health and WASH service in place when schools reopen.

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