



MAKING THE MID-DAY MEALS FUNCTIONAL FOLLOWING SCHOOL RE-OPENING | COVID19 RESPONSE

MID-DAY MEALS IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Mid-day meals (MDM) are one of the three main food-based safety nets in India, reaching close to 100 million school aged children with hot-cooked meals. In response to the lockdown, schools were closed across the country, but despite this, most states and UTs managed to provide the MDM entitlement to children in-kind or cash or both. This guidance is to help schools prepare for re-opening with a focus on food safety, health, and hygiene.

RATIONALE

School closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are an unprecedented risk to children's education, protection and wellbeing. Disruptions to instructional time in the classroom can have a severe impact on a child's ability to learn. The longer that vulnerable children are out of school, the less likely they are to return, particularly those who were already attending school irregularly. Further, prolonged closures disrupt essential school-based services such as school feeding, the school health programme and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and can cause stress and anxiety due to the loss of peer interaction, support and disrupted routines.

In India most schools were closed in

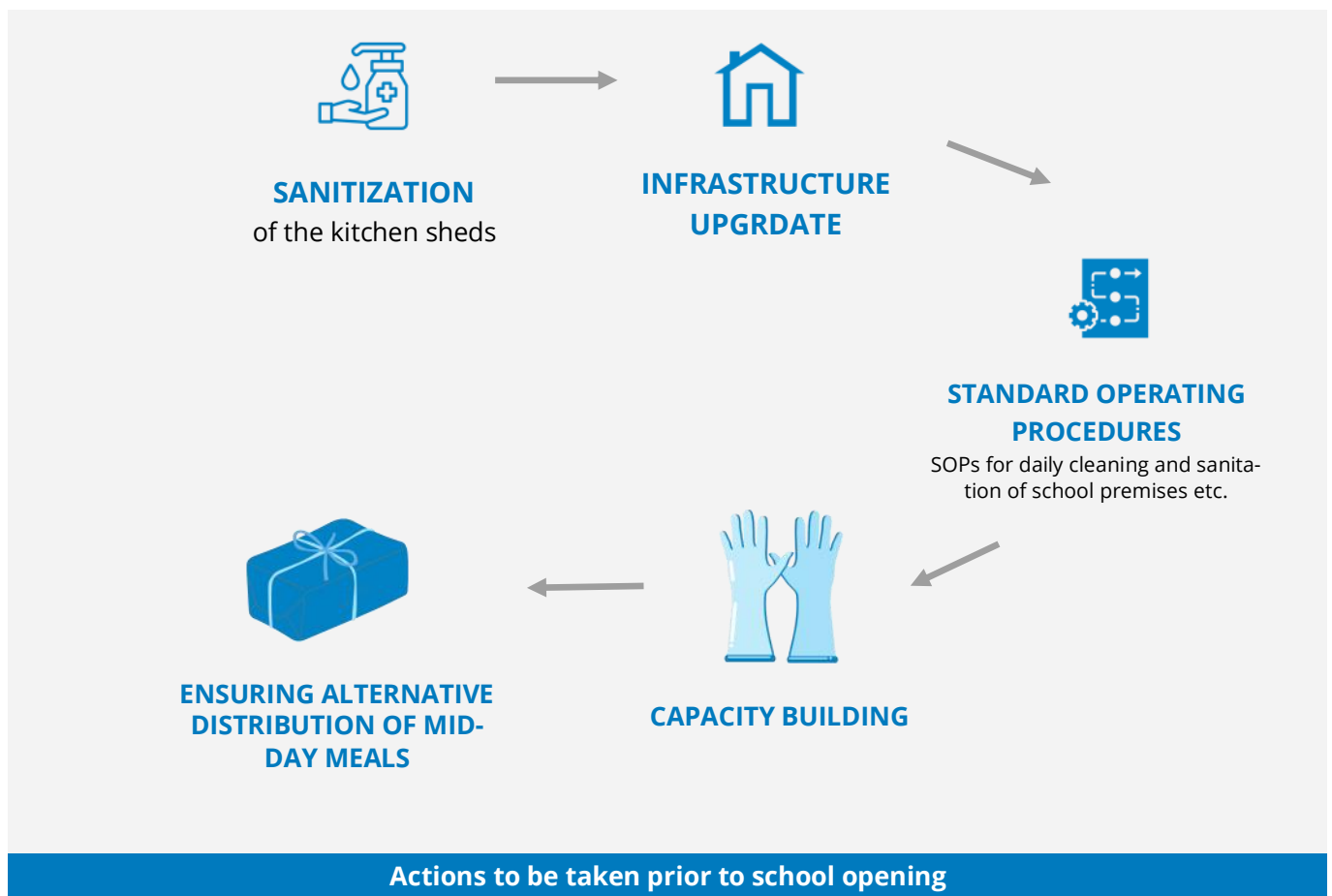
March to coincide with the nation-wide lockdown. Currently schools in India are closed for the summer holidays. The re-opening of schools, after the summer vacation should be guided by keeping the best interests of the children in mind, with a focus on health and hygiene, social distancing, nutrition as well as learning. School re-openings must be safe and consistent and aligned with India's overall COVID-19 health response, with all reasonable measures taken to protect students, staff, teachers and their families.

The Mid-day meal scheme represents a predictable support and lifeline for millions of school children in the country and has a significant impact on children's daily diet. Alongside the opening of schools, this scheme will also need to be made functional at the school with the provision of a hot cooked meal. Factors to keep in mind while doing so include the risk of transmission for school children, teachers and the cooks cum helpers.

ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN PRIOR TO SCHOOL OPENING

To ensure that the quality and safety of the midday meals served after re-opening of schools, a series of actions need to be taken prior to the opening of schools, including the following:

- **Sanitization of the kitchen sheds:** Many of the schools have been used as quarantine facilities for returning migrant workers. Therefore, before the schools are re-opened, all rooms on the school premises including the kitchen sheds should be sanitized and deep cleaned. Further there needs to be a SOP in place for daily cleaning and sanitization of the school premises.
- **Capacity building of the cooks cum helpers and sensitization of the school teachers:** Digital learning can be used to update cooks and teachers on hygiene, safety and social distancing in schools. Short videos on the SOPs enlisted should be developed for usage and viewing through social media platforms and smart phones etc.
- **Infrastructure upgrades:** Repair of the kitchen sheds as well as upgrading or construction of handwash stations and toilets including increasing availability of clean, drinking water.
- **Development of SOPs for ensuring alternative distribution of Mid-day meal entitlements:** In preparation for any future school closures, protocols for ensuring mid-day meal entitlements during school closures should be developed. They should build on recent experiences, highlighting best practices around the country.
- **Development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP):** SOPs for daily cleaning and sanitation of school premises, procurement & storage of raw materials, and cooking and serving Mid-day meals in the time of COVID need to be prepared and disseminated. A draft SOP outlining some of these actions is found in Annex I.



ANNEX I

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE COOK CUM HELPERS WHILE PROCURING FOR, PREPARING AND SERVING THE MID-DAY MEALS

I. Procurement of raw material

- Always follow the COVID-19 guidelines on social distancing while buying the raw material from shops.
- To avoid daily purchases, non-perishable food items should be bought for at least one month while the perishables should be bought for as long a period as possible taking into consideration the storage facilities in the school.
- To the extent possible, one shop near the school should be ear-marked for the procurement of the commodities.
- Buy the sealed packets of the food material after checking the 'Best Before' date and clean the packets with disinfectant once brought to the community kitchen
- Always wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly with 50 ppm chlorine (or equivalent solution) and clean potable water to remove the dirt and other contaminants.
- Clean/sanitise the outer package /cover of raw material and then transfer the material to the jars followed by washing of hands with soap.
- Setting up of kitchen gardens during this phase should be encouraged as this will help curtail movement outside of the school for procurement of raw materials.

II Preparing for cooking of the Mid-day meals

Personal hygiene: Cooks should adhere to the following basic tenets of personal hygiene:

- Take a bath and wash hair every day.
- Wear clean clothes every day.
- Keep nails short.
- Wash hands with soap after every 20 minutes, for 20-30 seconds.
- Wash hands with soap after using the toilets.
- Do not touch face, hair, eyes while cooking. In case touched, hands should be washed immediately with soap for at least 20-30 seconds.

- Cooks should not be allowed to cook if he/she is suffering from cough, fever and sneezing.
- Cooks to maintain respiratory etiquettes, i.e., do not sneeze in open, cover your mouth with a hanky or arms if you sneeze, do not talk while handling, preparing and serving food.

Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Cooks should wear an apron, head gear, and face mask, while cooking. If handmade face covers are used, ensure they are washed daily.
- Avoid shaking hands or hugging

Cleanliness and sanitation in kitchen and surroundings areas:

- The existing kitchen sheds in many of the schools may not be big enough to practice the social distancing norms and therefore cooking in the clean, hygienic, open spaces may be allowed.
- Cooks should follow the "Clean as you go" principle to maintain hygiene in the kitchen.
- All kitchen utensils and devices should be washed and sun-dried before using. Preferably use hot water (above 60 degrees Celsius) for washing and sanitizing.
- Frequently clean and sanitize common areas and door handles. Clean the place with soap and water followed by disinfectant, prepared by 1% hypochlorite solution, or any other disinfectant found to be effective against coronavirus.
- Do not spit inside or outside the kitchen.
- Wash dish cloths often in the warm water and store it in a clean container after sun drying.
- Hand sanitizer (60-70% alcohol) should be present at the wash basin for frequent hand cleaning by cooks to be used in absence of soap and water.
- Toilets should be cleaned frequently using water and detergent, followed with disinfection using 1 % hypochlorite solution. For metallic equipment and surfaces where bleach is not suitable, use 70% alcohol-based disinfectant.

Preventing Contamination

- Always keep raw/uncooked material and cooked food separately.
- Wash chopping board and knife with soap and water before using.
- Entry of animals/birds should be restricted through taking appropriate measures.
- Entry of any staff suffering from cough, cold or fever should be restricted.
- Cooked food should always be kept covered before serving

III. Cooking of the mid-day meals

- Assign one person per task in the kitchen: such as a designated person for preparation, one for cooking, and another for serving.
- Wherever possible, perform kitchen activities at appropriate distances e.g., there should be defined separations for raw material procurement area, drinking water storage, cutting of vegetables and cleaning of grains/pulses, cooking area, cooked food area.
- Maintaining a maximum possible distance between two persons working in kitchen at one point of time.
- The cooks should work with their faces in the opposite direction to maintain social distance.
- Cooks should avoid bare hand contact while cooking and serving the food; use of gloves is encouraged.

IV. Distribution or serving food

- The distribution of the Mid-day meal to the school children will need to be done in a staggered manner over a couple of hours to allow for following the social distancing norms. In case staggering the distribution may not be possible, children could be served the Mid-day meal in their respective class rooms. However, it is advisable to encourage open air seating with social distancing of 1-2 m.
- In case the meals are served in open spaces/ dining halls, necessary markings should guide the children on the seating arrangement.
- The serving and dining area should also be well sanitized before and after food consumption with 0.5 % chlorine solution or 1 % hypochlorite solution.
- There should not be any physical contact between staff and schoolchildren or objects such as food containers.
- The staff distributing the food should wear personal protective equipment such as hand gloves, face mask, head cover and shall maintain appropriate distance from the school children. The school children should also be encouraged to wear the masks while receiving the food.

- The staff at distribution should perform hand sanitisation regularly.
- High touch points such as ladles, tongs, handles etc should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.
- The school children should wash their hands before sitting down to eat and immediately after eating as well at the Multi-tap and cap hand wash stations with due social distancing.
- Meals may be served to the school children either in environmentally friendly disposable plates or in utensils brought from home.

V. Monitoring of the Mid-day meals:

- The scope/ role of the School Management Committee/ Parents teacher associations in these times will need to be broadened and they should be encouraged to be present during the food distribution to ensure adherence to the various preventive practises against COVID-19 amongst both the cooks cum helpers and the school children.
- The Headmaster and school teachers need to plan and ensure that all the points mentioned in the note are implemented in letter and spirit and that all students have understood the norms of social distancing, wearing mask, sanitizing hands/handwashing before/after taking food, proper way to clean the plates, etc.
- The Head masters and schoolteachers should be mandated to install Arogya Setu Application in their smart-phones

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