

# STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL REOPENINGS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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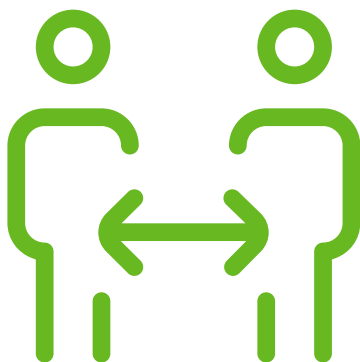
## SANITARY CONSIDERATIONS

When considering the reopening of schools, four key sanitary criteria should be considered to ensure that students and teachers alike are safe:

- A. Ensure social distancing;
- B. Keep schools clean and disinfected;
- C. Ensure that students and teachers enter school healthy and stay healthy; and
- D. Provide easy access to hand washing facilities.

The following are strategies for each of these criteria

## A. ENSURE SOCIAL DISTANCING



COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact with each other. Contagion takes place when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks and tiny droplets are propelled into the air and land in the mouth or nose of others who are nearby. COVID-19 can also be contracted when people touch a surface or object containing the virus and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes. Social distancing helps limit the contact with infected persons and contaminated surfaces. To ensure proper social distancing, schools may consider the following strategies:



### **A GRADUAL OR PHASED REOPENING OF SCHOOLS.**

In order to ensure social distancing, schools

need to have fewer students at one time. There are a number of options to achieve this goal:

- Reducing students' classroom attendance time and supplementing it with online or distance learning (blended models). Pupils could be divided into groups and made to attend class on different days/times.
- **Gradual or phased approach** strategies
  - **Based on students education level:** the first step could involve initial and primary level

pupils, who may find it harder to join distance learning because they require more support from their teachers. Secondary and tertiary students, who demand less support and can find it easier to adjust to distance learning, may follow.

- **Based on geographical areas:** a start could be made in rural areas with low population density and facing bigger challenges to provide distance learning (due to lack of electricity or internet connectivity), which do not require public transportation mobility or are free from COVID-19 cases.



**2. STAGGERING SCHOOL ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES** to prevent students and parents from crowding; designating, whenever possible, specific children drop-off and pickup times and places; and requesting parents to refrain from stopping to chat with each other when dropping off or picking up their children.



**3. SPACING OUT STUDENTS' DESKS** to boost physical distancing. All desks should be placed facing the same direction (rather than facing one another) to reduce the risk of virus transmission when students talk, cough or sneeze. Seating should be arranged to enable at least 1 meter (minimum) to 1.5 meter of separation between students in all directions, which naturally implies reducing the number of students per classroom. To make up for the fewer classrooms that will be available, other areas such as dining halls, multipurpose rooms or roofed schoolyards could be converted into temporary classrooms.

#### BOX 1: Students per classroom during COVID

An IDB study<sup>1</sup> shows that schools in Latin America and the Caribbean currently have, on average, one student per 1.6 m<sup>2</sup>. Given the recommendation to keep a safe distance during classes, students' seats should be individually separated and rearranged to enable at least 1 m (minimum) to 1.5 m distance in all directions. This means having classrooms with 2.25 m<sup>2</sup> (minimum) to 4 m<sup>2</sup> separation between each student and between students and their teachers. The following chart shows how these new standards could impact the number of students per classroom if these recommendations are followed.

Table. Example of variation in the number of students per classroom to boost physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19							
	Current (average)			Example with 2.25 M <sup>2</sup> /Person		Example with 4 M <sup>2</sup> /Person	
	M <sup>2</sup> / classroom	Students/ classroom	M <sup>2</sup> / student	Students + 1 teacher / classroom	% Students reduction	Students + 1 teacher / classroom	% Students reduction
Argentina	45	30	1.5	19S + 1T	37%	10S + 1 T	67%
Barbados	54	30	1.8	23S + 1T	23%	13S + 1 T	57%
Chile	44	29	1.5	19S + 1T	34%	10S + 1 T	66%
Colombia	65	39	1.81	28S + 1T	28%	15S + 1 T	62%
Costa Rica	52	30	1.53	22S + 1T	27%	12S + 1 T	60%
Dominican Rep.	50	35	1.43	21S + 1T	40%	12S + 1 T	66%
Guatemala	60	40	1.5	26S + 1T	35%	14S + 1 T	65%
Honduras	72	45	1.6	31S + 1T	31%	17S + 1 T	62%
Jamaica	54	32	1.7	23S + 1T	28%	13S + 1 T	59%
México	78	45	1.73	34S + 1T	24%	19S + 1 T	58%
Uruguay	49	30	1.6	21S + 1T	33%	11S + 1 T	63%

Source: IDB data based on a survey conducted within the framework of the Learning in 21st Century Schools project (2018)

<sup>1</sup>Aprendizaje en las escuelas del siglo XXI Nota 6. Normas y costos de la infraestructura escolar Andrea Bardone & Carlos Gargiulo, December 2014.





#### 4. CANCEL GROUP ACTIVITIES AND CLASSES,

including fieldtrips, class meetings and other large gatherings, sports events, choirs, and parents meetings throughout the school. To prevent students from mingling with those from other classes at the gym or the music room, teachers could be asked to come to their classrooms instead.



#### 5. AVOID BRINGING STUDENTS INTO COMMON AREAS.

This can be achieved by, for example, having children have breakfast or lunch in the classroom rather than in the cafeteria. If suspending the use of common areas is not workable, then taking steps to minimize physical interactions among pupils is of the essence, particularly among those from different classes. Options include taking turns for lunch and recess and letting only a few students at a time go pick up books from the library.



#### 6. LIMIT CORRIDORS AND BATHROOMS CROWDING,

for example staggering school arrivals and departures and preventing students of different classrooms from using the bathroom at the same time, particularly after lunchtime or during recess. Use signage and posters to mark meeting and separation areas, as well as floor markings to ensure children waiting their turns keep a safe distance.



#### 7. REDUCE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN RIDING SCHOOL BUSES AT THE SAME TIME.

Staggering school arrival and leaving times will help in this sense. Steps should be taken to ensure that time is set aside for proper bus cleaning and sanitation between rides.



#### 8. MINIMIZE HEALTH OFFICE CONGESTION,

for example using the health office for children with flu-like symptoms and satellite location for first-aid or medicine distribution purposes.



#### 9. STRUCTURE MEAL SCHEDULES TO AVOID STAFF AND STUDENT CONGESTION

during meal preparation, delivery and consumption. In addition, pay special attention to hygiene measures for food handling.



#### 10. LIMIT NON-ESSENTIAL VISITS,

such as those by school room-activity volunteers, mystery readers, cafeteria helpers, etc.



#### 11. COACH STAFF AS WELL AS STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF OBSERVING PHYSICAL

**DISTANCING** at school.

## B. KEEP SCHOOLS CLEAN AND DISINFECTED



The COVID-19 outbreak calls for urgent cleaning and disinfection of spaces used by students and teachers. This includes cleaning and disinfecting all classrooms, furniture, corridors and other common areas, sports and sanitary facilities, administrative offices and inner and outer doors, as well as school transport vehicles both before and after schools reopen. In this context, schools might consider the following strategies:



### 1. DEEP CLEANING AND DISINFECTION OF EDUCATION FACILITIES BEFORE THE RETURN OF STUDENTS

and teaching staff. To this end, it is crucial to:

- a. **Provide janitors** with cleaning supplies
- b. **Provide adequate training** to janitors



### 2. STRENGTHEN ROUTINE CLEANING AND DISINFECTION ACTIVITIES,

in particular of objects and surfaces that are frequently touched, such as doorknobs, light switches, sink taps, computers, and desks. It is recommended to use common cleaning products and to follow manufacturers' instructions on concentration,

method of application, time of contact, etc.

- a. **Provide janitors** with cleaning supplies.
- b. **Provide cleaning kits to classrooms** and administrative offices so that frequently used objects and surfaces –such as keyboards, desks, remote controls, etc.– can be cleaned regularly.
- c. **Train students, teachers, and education staff in general on cleaning and disinfection techniques of frequently used objects** such as chairs, benches, desks and computers. Supplement this with information (posters) on cleaning and disinfection techniques and frequency (for example, before using, at the end of a class, or at the end of the day).
- d. **Open external doors and windows regularly** to increase air circulation in areas subject to cleaning and disinfection.



**3. BOOST UP THE CLEANING WORKFORCE IN SCHOOLS,** since more frequency and intensity of cleaning will require more janitors.



**4. USE NATURAL VENTILATION OR AIR CONDITIONING UNITS THAT INJECT OUTSIDE AIR** to prevent spreading of the virus. Air

conditioning units that do not pump in fresh air from the outside (such as the split type) are not recommended. Ceiling fans should be clean and work in tandem with natural ventilation.

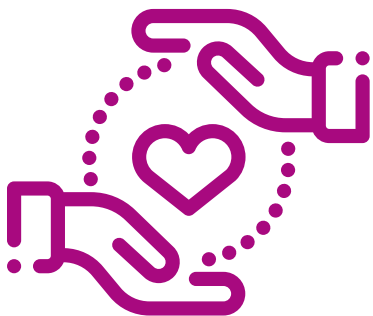


**5. SET UP A PROTOCOL IN CASE OF A POSITIVE CASE OF COVID IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY.** This

includes canceling classes for 2 to 5 days to give local health officials time to clean up and sanitize the school and determine a course of action. Areas that were exposed to people infected with COVID-19 must be closed down and resumption of cleaning and disinfection work should be put off as long as is practical in order to minimize potential staff exposure to the virus. External doors and windows should be opened to increase air circulation in these areas. Wherever possible, it is recommended to wait up to 24 hours before conducting cleaning and disinfection procedures. Staff must clean and disinfect all areas (such as offices, bathrooms and common areas) used by infected individuals, with a special focus on frequently touched surfaces. If those surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned with all-purpose detergent or water and soap before disinfection.



## C. ENSURE THAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ENTER SCHOOL HEALTHY AND STAY HEALTHY



When the school reopens, it will be crucial to maximize efforts to ensure that children and teachers are healthy, thereby minimizing contagion hazards at the premises. To this end, schools may consider adopting the following strategies:



**1. DEFINE PROTOCOLS TO MONITOR THE HEALTH CONDITION OF STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF AS THEY ENTER SCHOOL EVERY DAY,** e.g. by checking their temperature.



**2. KEEP IN TOUCH WITH LOCAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES,** for example setting up an emergency committee with links to and permanent coordination with such authorities.



**3. ASK ALL CHILDREN AND STAFF WHO FEEL UNWELL TO STAY AT HOME.** Design communication campaigns for students and parents about the symptoms they should be looking out for, advice on when it is best to stay at home and when it is safe to return to school. This should include easy-to-read information (posters) inside the school and on its front doors, where it can be easily and frequently seen by students and parents.



**4. INSTITUTE FREQUENT HAND-WASHING ROUTINES.** This includes requiring children and teachers alike to wash their hands upon arriving at school and again periodically while they are in the premises, perhaps every two hours.





**5. IMPLEMENT FLEXIBLE ATTENDANCE AND SICK-LEAVE POLICIES**

that encourage students and staff to stay at home if they feel unwell or need to look after a sick relative. Any rewards and incentives for perfect attendance should be terminated. For teachers and administrative staff, it's important to identify their main responsibilities and train alternates in case of absences.



**6. ESTABLISH RESPONSE PROTOCOLS FOR STUDENTS OR TEACHERS WHO FEEL UNWELL AT SCHOOL,**

including isolation and sending them home or to a local health center as soon as possible.



**7. PROMOTE THE USE OF FACE COVERING BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS.**

Depending on each country's health regulations on the use of face protection, schools may consider requiring the use of face masks in the premises. However, it should be noted that for many students –in particular younger children– keeping face covering properly in place throughout the school day can be a major challenge.



**8. MAINTAIN A PERMANENT DIALOGUE WITH STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

about the steps the school is taking to preserve a healthy learning environment. This includes having a communication strategy ready in the event that the school needs to close suddenly should any positive COVID case be detected in the premises.

## D. PROVIDE EASY ACCESS TO HANDWASHING FACILITIES



Handwashing is key to reducing COVID transmission, therefore it should be encouraged through measures such as access to sufficient and safe water, soap, and other hand-cleaning elements. Strategies to ensure access to handwashing include:



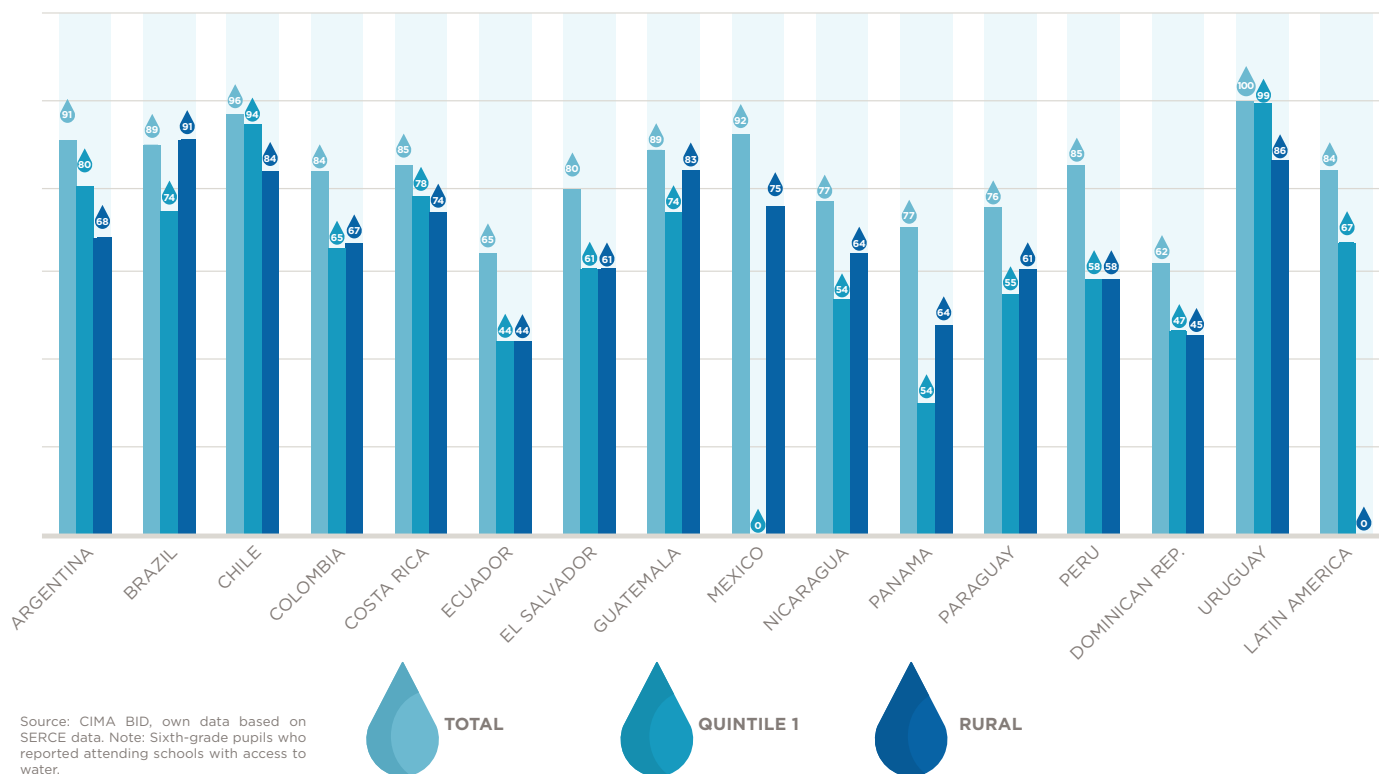
### 1. VERIFYING THAT PROPER INFRASTRUCTURE IS IN PLACE TO RESUME CLASSES. IN PARTICULAR, SCHOOL HANDWASHING FACILITIES SHOULD BE MAPPED.

During temporary closures, schools may suffer decay, robbery or vandalism, so a speedy inventory of facility conditions at the time of reopening is of the essence. Ensuring that the school has access to drinking water and handwashing facilities is also vital. This requires implementing a communications mechanism so schools can quickly convey their needs to the education authorities. For example, it could include a dedicated telephone number for schools to communicate their needs to the authorities. The inventory should also include:

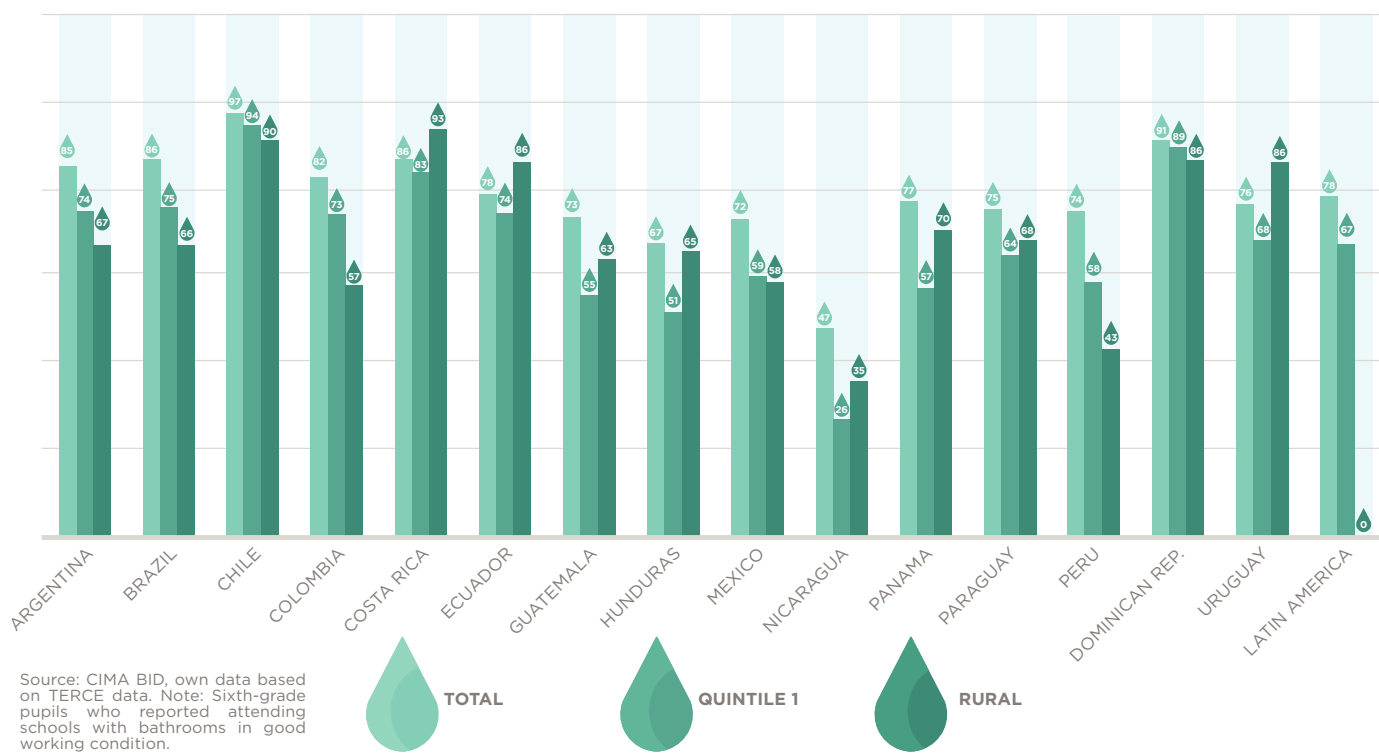
- Availability of uninterrupted of quality drinking water.
- Availability of water storage capacity, since consumption will increase.
- Availability of sanitary and handwashing facilities, whose sizes should be adjusted to school-children's ages.
- Septic tanks spacious enough to store a larger volume of water.
- Classrooms with good natural ventilation.
- Cleaning and maintenance staff capable of providing daily cleaning service.
- Availability of cleaning and hygiene supplies for facilities and users.
- Daily waste collection or safe storage facilities.

## BOX 2: Sanitary conditions of schools in Latin America

### ACCESS TO WATER IN LATIN AMERICA'S PRIMARY SCHOOLS.



### ACCESS TO BATHROOMS IN GOOD WORKING CONDITION IN LATIN AMERICA'S PRIMARY SCHOOLS.







## 2. REFURBISH INFRASTRUCTURE TO ENSURE SCHOOL MEETS MINIMUM HEALTH REQUIREMENTS, PARTICULARLY

**REGARDING TO HANDWASHING.** Given the importance of handwashing to prevent COVID contagion, it is necessary to provide access to handwashing facilities. This means making the following investments:

- Undertake unresolved repairs, particularly of hydro-sanitary installations.
- Increase the number of handwashing points, including at school entrance or outside the building.
- Add tanks to store a bigger volume of water to accommodate expected higher demand.
- Make sure maintenance and repair staff is readily available to keep installations in good condition.

### TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF HANDWASHING POINTS, THE FOLLOWING OPTIONS COULD BE CONSIDERED<sup>2</sup>:

HANDWASHING POINTS CONNECTED TO EXISTING RUNNING WATER AND SEWAGE SYSTEMS:

- Washbasins placed near bathrooms  
Washbasins placed inside classrooms
- External taps placed in schoolyards, playgrounds, school entrance, and other shared areas



### SELF-STANDING HANDWASHING SITES:

- Portable, self-standing washbasins using alternative water source, such as rainwater
  - a. Simple, low-cost options may include:
    - i. Water jug and basin (one person pours water while other washes hands);
    - b. Small tank (such as oil drum) fitted with a tap and placed on top of a stand, which can be filled with a bucket; drain water can be collected in small cesspool or basin;
    - c. Empty gourd or plastic bottle hanging from string and pouring small amount of water when tipped; and
    - d. Elevated water tanks connected to plastic pipes fitted with several external taps.

<sup>2</sup>See catalog of low-cost group washbins: [Handwashing in Schools](#)

The presence of certain features has shown to foster the use of washbasins. These include: (i) a mirror placed next to the washbasin, which boosts up both the number of times and the time spent washing hands; (ii) availability of soap; and (iii) allowing children to interact when washing hands.



### 3. HAVING SUFFICIENT WATER FOR WASHING HANDS.

As handwashing frequency is increased as a contingency measure, demand for water goes up. However, many schools have no water supply at all while at others supply is insufficient, unstable and of non-optimal quality. This situation is further complicated by climate change, which is causing an increase in drought periods and compromising water availability. In this sense, two key strategies can be implemented:

- a. Raise the amount of network water supplied to the school.
- b. Apply alternative water collection and storage methods. These include:
  - Installing additional tanks to store piped water.
  - Installing additional storage tanks and making supply arrangements with municipalities or directly with utilities.
  - Digging wells and pumping up groundwater.
  - Installing additional storage tanks and implementing rainwater collection systems.
  - Digging septic tanks large enough to hold the

largest possible amount of wastewater. More frequent septic tank cleanups will also be necessary.



### 4. AVAILABILITY OF SOAP FOR WASHING HANDS.

Proper handwashing requires providing schools with personal cleaning elements: soap, paper towels, antibacterial gel dispensers (particularly where there is no access to water or to handwashing facilities), especially in schools with unstable water supply.

- **PLACE SOAP AT HANDWASHING FACILITIES IN A VISIBLE SPOT.** Options for making soap always available include creative solutions such as fixed liquid soap dispensers and soap bars tied to a string.
- **FOR HAND DRYING PURPOSES, THE BEST OPTION IS PAPER TOWELS,** ideally made from recycled paper to minimize the environmental impact; however, this can be expensive. Other options include hot or cold air systems, also good for the environment but costly; open-air drying can also be used if other options are not suitable.

# IDB SUPPORT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE STRATEGIES



The IDB can play a key role, providing technical assistance and financing to support countries' efforts to implement these sanitary strategies when schools reopen. In the next paragraphs, we will outline the types of support we could provide along four sanitary criteria to follow at school reopening time: **A. ENSURE SOCIAL DISTANCING**; **B. KEEP SCHOOLS CLEAN AND DISINFECTED**; **C. ENSURING THAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ENTER SCHOOL HEALTHY AND STAY HEALTHY**; and **D. PROVIDE EASY ACCESS TO HANDWASHING FACILITIES**.

## A. ENSURING SOCIAL DISTANCING TO REDUCE COVID-19 TRANSMISSION

- Technical assistance to devise a gradual or phased school reopening strategy, including reformulating the school calendar with different days and times for classes, and rearranging classroom and common spaces furniture and school transport.
- Investing on the necessary infrastructure to rearrange spaces (classrooms and common areas) to put them to different uses and/or to ensure social distancing.

## B. KEEPING SCHOOLS CLEAN AND DISINFECTED

- Provide schools with cleaning kits: initial cleaning and disinfection kits for use prior to reopening, and kits for frequent use when schools become operational again.
- Kits to keep classrooms clean during use; cleaning supplies to help students and teachers keep clean their desks, chairs, computers and objects in general.
- Training for cleaning staff, teachers and students on the importance of cleaning and disinfection of spaces, objects and surfaces.

## C. ENSURING THAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ENTER SCHOOL HEALTHY AND STAY HEALTHY

- Investments and technical assistance to monitor students' health; development of audiovisual material and of communication strategies to promote sanitation practices: frequent handwashing, staying home when sick.
- Investment in face masks for school use.

## D. PROVIDING EASY ACCESS TO HANDWASHING FACILITIES

- Investments for mapping of needs, infrastructure conditioning to ensure minimum school sanitation conditions (more washbasins, sanitary facilities, water storage), availability of soap or other handwashing elements.

# AUTHORS

This document was compiled by Maria Soledad Bos, Wilhelm Dalaison and Livia Minoja, from the Education Division and the Infrastructure and Energy Department of the Inter-American Development Bank.

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