

Correspondence

Face-to-face classes during COVID-19: a call for deliberate and well-planned school health protocols in the Philippine context

ABSTRACT

Schooling is one of the most affected aspects of human life due to coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In a recent correspondence published, the authors reminded every country of their responsibility to come up with strategies to reopen schools safely. This paper reiterates the adherence of school health protocols as significant in the delivery of face-to-face classes following national and international guidelines in mitigating the effects of COVID-19 pandemic as a public health crisis.

Keywords face-to-face classes, COVID-19, health protocols, public health

Schooling is one of the most affected aspects of human life due to coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Since the rise and threat of the pandemic, many countries around the world have decided to temporarily close schools that have affected millions of students.¹ Consequently, students who are mostly children have been facing a learning crisis due to the pandemic.² In a recent correspondence published in this journal, the authors cited that every country has the responsibility to come up with strategies to reopen schools in a safe manner.³

In the Philippines, the government's Department of Education has come up with guidelines to implement online and modular distance learning delivery of instruction.⁴ This is to safeguard students from being infected by the disease. However, plans to conduct the pilot implementation of limited face-to-face delivery in low-risk areas of COVID-19 transmission for January 2021 have been approved by the president⁵ but later recalled⁶ due to the threat of the new strain of COVID-19. Predicaments are raised whether the country is ready to open its schools for students to go for face-to-face learning despite having been one of the longest and strictest lockdowns in the world.

School reopening for face-to-face interactions must be carefully planned to ensure the safety of students as well as teachers and school staff in a staged fashion especially in following physical distancing.^{7,8} Planning and execution of school health protocols during this pandemic must be supported by the truthful data⁹ being given by various institutions. Last 11 December 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) has published a checklist to support school

reopening and the preparation for the possible resurgence of COVID-19.¹⁰ WHO cited that "The checklist is aligned with, and builds upon, existing COVID-19-related WHO guidelines and is structured around protective measures related to: 1) hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette; 2) physical distancing; 3) use of masks in schools; 4) environmental cleaning and ventilation; and 5) respecting procedures for isolation of all people with symptoms."¹⁰ The checklist helps policymakers and school officials to enhance compliance and adherence to public health protocols in the time of the pandemic.¹⁰

In conclusion, school health protocols in conducting face-to-face classes must be planned carefully following national and international guidelines to ensure that students will be safe or at least mitigate the effects of COVID-19. After all, students' lives matter as education does to them. That is the responsibility of every government to ensure its fulfillment.

Acknowledgment

No funding was received from this paper.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this paper.

Authors' contribution

All authors contributed to all aspects of the manuscript.

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doi: 10.1093/pubmed/fdab006