

## Correspondence

# Cautious and gradual reopening of limited face-to-face classes in Philippine tertiary schools

### ABSTRACT

In a recent correspondence, the authors suggested that secondary schools must adhere to health protocols and national and international guidelines so that the delivery of face-to-face classes will not risk students' and educators' health. With this, this paper proposes that even in higher education, a well-planned execution of face-to-face classes must be done. Thus, the gradual reopening of face-to-face classes becomes a necessity in order to gain a sense of normalcy in the middle of a pandemic.

**Keywords** COVID-19, face-to-face classes, higher education institutions, public health

A recent correspondence tackled the adherence of secondary schools to health protocols as a significant factor in the delivery of face-to-face classes, following national and international guidelines in mitigating the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).<sup>1</sup> This article highlights how, in the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Department of Health have prepared a joint memorandum circular regarding the guidelines on the gradual reopening of limited face-to-face classes of higher education institutions (HEIs).

Face-to-face classes are limited to students of medicine and allied health courses. Campuses in areas under general community quarantine and modified general community quarantine are only allowed to reoperate physically with programs on medicine, nursing, medical technology, medical laboratory science, physical therapy, midwifery and public health.<sup>2</sup>

For students and school staff, bringing of face masks, face shields and other personal hygiene kits, such as ethyl alcohol (70%), hand sanitizer, cleansing wipes/tissue/hand towel and hand soap, is required.<sup>2</sup> They are discouraged to buy food outside the campus to avoid physical contact during breaktime periods. They are to eat in their assigned seats inside classrooms with clear partition because they will remove their face masks and face shields while eating and drinking. They are to stay at home when they are symptomatic. Only students who are least 20 years in age are allowed to attend face-to-face classes.

For HEIs, collaboration with the local government units is needed, with a presented contingency plan for resumption of the limited physical classes. The maximum number of students should be allowed, provided that a distance of 1.5 m must be observed between each student.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, extracurricular activities are banned to avoid mass gatherings. Schools shall re-design the layouts of their facilities to ensure physical distancing.<sup>2</sup> Health declaration forms and body temperature are still to be taken at the entrance of the school premises. Another responsibility of the school administrators is to ensure the transparent partition between the faculty and the students while classes are ongoing. School libraries are also open with limited time to encourage students to maximize the use of online library services.<sup>2</sup> Also, all school facilities and equipment are to be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

Without prior notice, the CHED may order the immediate suspension of any school that will violate health protocols and other provisions prescribed under the circular. This effort of the Philippine government is to augment the number of health workers during this pandemic.<sup>3</sup> A youth group in the country, however, clamors that the government must not allow face-to-face classes until the vaccination program takes place,<sup>4</sup> which is a hot issue nowadays.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, the gradual reopening of face-to-face classes becomes a necessity in order to gain a sense of normalcy in the middle of a pandemic.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in this paper.

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## References

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