Expected impact of reopening schools after lockdown in India

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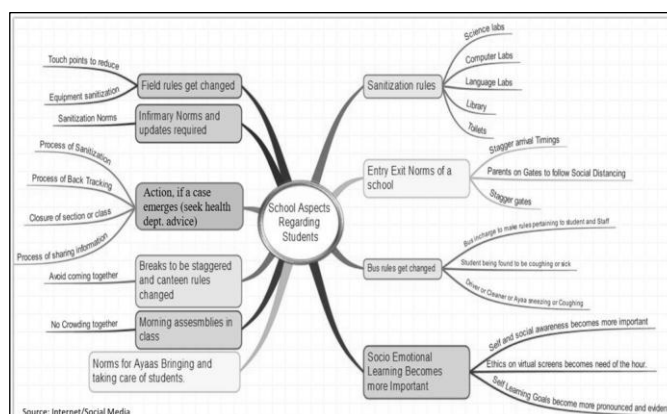*pratik.darbhe@gmail.com*
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ABSTRACT

Schools and colleges across the country have been closed since the second week of March in the wake of Covid-19. As the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is working on guidelines for the reopening of schools after the lockdown. Some of the suggested measures include having no assembly sessions, seminars and gatherings in schools for a long time. Apart from this, schools are also likely to call only 30 per cent of students at a time to maintain social distancing.

Keywords— *Covid-19, NCERT, Lockdown, Diksha*

1. INTRODUCTION

As several state around in the India are planning exit strategies to progressively lift the rigid social restrictions implemented with lockdown, different options are being chosen regarding the closure or reopening of schools. We evaluate the expected impact of reopening schools in India after the withdrawal of lockdown currently scheduled for 31 July 2020. We explore several scenarios of partial, progressive, or full school reopening, coupled with moderate social distancing interventions and large-scale tracing, testing, and isolation. Accounting for current uncertainty on the role of children in COVID-19 epidemic, we test different hypotheses on children's transmissibility distinguishing between younger children (pre-school and primary school age) and adolescents (middle and high school age).
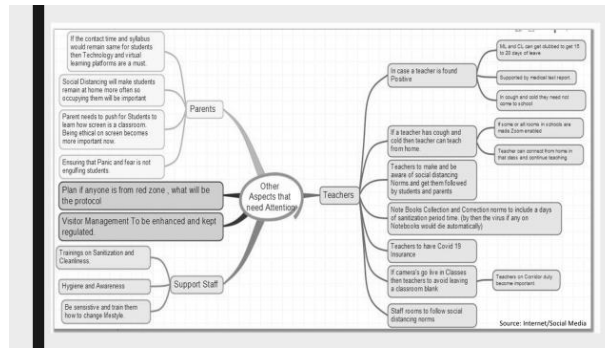

Source: Internet/Social Media

School Scheduling after Lockdown

No morning assembly, no seminars and no sports events, this is how schools across the country are likely to function once they reopen post the Covid-19 lockdown. Schools and colleges across the country have been closed since the second week of March and while there is no clarity on when they will reopen, the Government has begun working on a plan that will be put in place once students are back in classrooms.
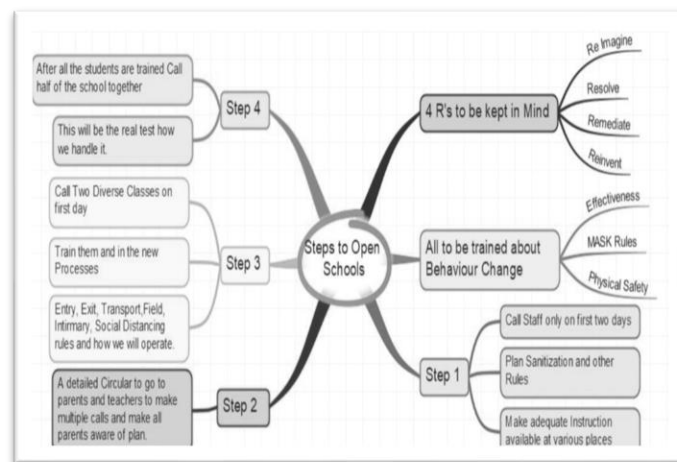
No social activities for a year

According to sources, some of the guidelines that are being worked out include banning social activities such as seminars, sports events and even assembly gatherings for up to a year. The safety guidelines will be made available to schools before the government decides to order their re-opening. "There are a number of things that we will have to look at … how to maintain distance between students in school buses, while they are sitting in the classrooms and even when they are using the washroom, because a large number of students use a single washroom in schools,"

Current Scenarios for reopening of schools
We simulate the reopening of schools on 31 July 2020 through three sets of four different scenarios, including progressive, partial, and full reopening, differentiated for type of schools (pre-school, primary, and middle, high school). Partial reopening means that at most 50% of students return to school, envisioning for example a rotation of students every half of the week or every week, or considering 50% attending in the morning and 50% in the afternoon. Progressive reopening is tested starting with an attendance of 25% in the first week that gradually increases over the following weeks, up to 50% (partial attendance) or 100% (full attendance). Full reopening starting on 30 September 2020 is also considered.

Technical Difficulty of Reopening School after Lockdown in India
Schools and colleges have been shut since mid-March due to the coronavirus induced lockdown. Teachers have been asked to tutor from home using online modes. He urged teachers to continue online teaching through various modes including SWAYAM, SWAYAM Prabha, Diksha, etc. He also urged teachers to contribute to interactive and innovative ways of digital learning for Diksha portal. He informed that so far the HRD Ministry has received over 9000 contributions. HRD remarked, "We should treat this situation as an opportunity and strengthen the digital infrastructure."

Experts suggest safety guidelines for schools
Some of the suggested measures include having one student per bench with 6 feet distance between two students, rotational online and offline classes for students and splitting the class into two and conducting double shifts to ensure that all students don't have to come at the same time. In order to ensure the safety and well-being of students once schools open, a group of educationists from the country have come up with a list of suggestions and recommendations that schools could adhere to once the lockdown ends.

The document also suggests the formation of a core committee consisting of the school's heads and medical professionals to conduct safety audits of campuses, recommend home quarantine of students if required and to prepare for any kind of health emergencies.

"The anxiety level among the parents post the Covid19 Lockdown might remain high, till a vaccine is found. Hence schools have to start incorporating changes in their campus and innovate structures which enable them to function with a blended learning education model (school + online+ home), if they wish to retain the trust of parents when it comes to being a safe campus.

A shift system in schools
Officials in NCERT told that the council has suggested two ways a staggered attendance system can be pulled off – either calling some students on one day and the remaining on other days, or managing in shifts wherever it is possible. Apart from plans to start the new academic session, the HRD minister also informed teachers who are on board evaluation duty that they do not need to juggle it with online classes. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has started the evaluation work for Class 10-12 board exams from 12 May. Answer sheets are being sent to teachers' homes so that all safety norms are followed.

2. CONCLUSION

Modified seating arrangements, change in timings and further division of the class into different sections could be among the key features in schools when they re-open amid the coronavirus pandemic. Social distancing needs to be maintained not only during classes but also during transport facilities like school bus service. He explained, "It is quite possible that classes would be able to incapacitate only 30 per cent of students they used to have before coronavirus. These modalities are being worked out by NCERT." The NCERT is exploring a new system for opening schools, while the UGC is working out modalities for higher educational institutes, including colleges and universities for the upcoming session, he stated. A task force will be created to maintain sanitization, health standards in schools. UGC has already asked colleges to create a COVID-19 cell in each institute to handle coronavirus-related issues.

3. REFERENCES

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