



Department of Health and Wellness

May 22, 2020

Considerations for Phased School Opening

In an effort to respond to and prepare for COVID-19, Saint Lucia implemented a number of control measures. Some of these measures included movement restrictions, closure of businesses, travel restrictions, the 24 hour shut down, the institution of curfews and from very early, the closure of schools.

Saint Lucia, like many other countries in the region, has demonstrated that COVID-19 transmission can be slowed down and stopped. To date, we have recorded a total of 18 cases, all of which have fully recovered. The last case was diagnosed over 19 days ago.

As countries manage to maintain low level transmission of COVID-19 a national risk assessment is done to balance the risk of relaxing measures, capacity to detect, test, isolate and treat cases efficiently. The risk assessment is based on epidemiological factors, health care capacities and the availability of effective treatments. The adjusting of measures should be done in a controlled, slow and stepwise manner. As the measures are lifted the strengthening of public health and social measures being implemented is necessary. It is estimated that COVID-19 will be here with us for over 2 years. The education sector, in a similar way, like every sector needs to implement protocols to ensure safe instruction of our students. In reality is the option keeping schools closed for 2 years?

We understand the fear and panic related to COVID-19 and this is also justified given the pandemic in the developed world. But we cannot act out of fear, we need to use the assessment of our local situation and ensure the necessary measures are in place to move forward.

Over the last few months the Ministry of Education and Culture has been working closely with the Ministry of Health in making decisions in relation to classes for 2 critical groups, the Grade 6 students and Form 5 students. The risk based assessments includes the current understanding about COVID-19 transmission in children (data indicates mild disease in children), the local situation and epidemiology of COVID-19, the school setting and ability to maintain COVID-19 prevention and control measures. Additional factors that must also be considered include the harm that may occur due to school closure including the risk of non-return to school, widening disparity in educational attainment, limited access to meals, the need to maintain schools at least partially open for children whose caregivers are essential workers.

Our national situation in relation to COVID-19 has been explained. Based on the gains made from an empirical standpoint, schools can be given the green light to open up completely. Out of abundance of caution it is recommended keep the general school population closed with the online model and to concentrate only on these 2 critical groups due to their pending examinations.

According to the World Health Organization, there have been few COVID-19 outbreaks in schools, from the studies conducted the

transmission was primarily related to social events linked to schools rather than transmission within classrooms.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness through the use of scientific, evidence based and using the epidemiological analysis on our national situation will continue to work closely with the Ministry of Education as we transition through a phased, priority based plan to ensure safe educational environment to all of our students, staff and management of these institutions.