

Guidance for English Language Teaching Schools on re-opening during the COVID-19 Transition Phase

General Information on COVID-19

Coronaviruses are viruses which cause respiratory symptoms ranging from the common cold to more serious illnesses such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). They are a family of viruses which are present both in humans and in animals. They are spread from one person to another through:

- ✓ Coughing and sneezing (via droplets)
- ✓ Hands which have become contaminated with the virus after touching contaminated surfaces or
- ✓ Through direct contact with a person infected with the coronavirus (such as caring for a sick person)

For further information on how the virus is transmitted, the symptoms of the illness and what to do if sick or have symptoms, refer to:

<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Pages/symptoms.aspx>

<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Pages/resources.aspx>

Purpose of guidance document

This guidance has been drawn up for English Language Teaching (ELT) Schools in Malta. It must be reminded that this guideline is a living document, correct at the time of writing and based on the current available evidence. As new evidence emerges updates will be made accordingly in consultation with the stakeholders. It is advisable that all English Language Schools in Malta assign a senior member of staff the role of COVID-19 Mitigation Officer to ensure that he/she keeps abreast with all policies and procedures issued by the Public Health Authorities. This officer should be the focal point to ensure that all mitigation measures indicated are implemented and adhered to.

English Language Schools in Malta are regulated by the English Language Teaching Council Regulations as per L.N. 221 of 2015. Failure of adherence to these conditions could result in enforcement according to this Act.

Each ELT School should have a COVID-19 mitigating plan specific for its needs and layout, based on the legal regulations as per L.N. 221 of 2015 and based on these guidelines. This should comprise a plan of action indicating how the ELT School intends to implement these guidelines. All necessary safety procedures have to be implemented by the ELT School according to their specific setup.

These guidelines are meant to mitigate, as much as possible, against the transmission of COVID-19. Although the risk of infection is reduced, it can never be completely eliminated. Clients need to understand that a risk of transmission will still exist even if these guidelines are rigorously followed and implemented.

Obligatory Conditions

- a) Only students who have travelled from the countries in accordance with L.N. 244/20 on travel and the COVID-19 website should be accepted for booking. It is necessary that travelling students abide by all the legislation and regulations which will be drafted with respect to travelers from overseas.
- b) The School must exercise the right of refusal of entry onto the premises of patrons if they are visibly unwell or have respiratory symptoms.
- c) Students should only be allowed on premises during the time of their allocated lessons. No loitering will be permissible.
- d) The School must subject patrons to temperature checks at the entrance of the premises to check for the presence of fever. Persons with a temperature of 37.2°C or higher will be denied entrance.
- e) The School shall provide adequate and easily accessible containers with an appropriate 70% alcohol hand-rub at the entrance of the premises and outside each classroom and at strategic points throughout the school and ensure that all persons sanitise their hands on entry and exit.
- f) The School must regulate entrance into and exit from the premises, adopting crowd management techniques with visible markings where possible.
- g) There are to be no large gatherings or assemblies.
- h) The School must affix visible signage at the entrance of the premises indicating the maximum capacity that the premises can hold at any one time and the maximum capacity in each classroom.
- i) The maximum student capacity in a classroom is to be based on an adequate distance between students whilst sitting in their chair.
- j) In the classroom, the students should all face in the same direction and none should be facing each other.
- k) Both students and staff are always required to wear a face mask or visor outside of the classroom. In the classroom, masks and visors do not need to be worn.
- l) There should be a designated system where the staff member is assigned to the same classroom/cluster of students over a period of time. Wherever possible, students and staff must remain within the same classroom/cluster/group, which composition

should remain constant and social distance be observed. In particular, there should be no unnecessary contact between students, or between students and staff members.

- m) Daily attendance of students should be taken for each classroom/group and capacity monitoring should be done through regular daily checks.
- n) The School must provide ongoing cleaning and disinfection operations of all the common areas and classrooms inside the premises. Cleaning and disinfection regimes must be documented.
- o) Acrylic screens or tempered glass barriers must be fitted in reception areas (2 meters high from the floor); (If this not manned then this is not required).
- p) Water dispensers are prohibited. All staff and clients should be encouraged to bring their own water.
- q) Any canteen on the premises should comply with the regulations issued by MTA and Public Health Authorities.
- r) The School must keep a list and contact details (name and contact number) of all people accessing the premises for 28 days (students, staff, suppliers, maintenance, cleaners, etc).

Activities and Excursions

It is recommended that students engage in activities within the same group in their cluster/class.

On occasions where students from the same cluster have to be paired up for an activity, measures have to be taken to ensure adequate physical distancing.

Testing of students for COVID-19

In order to ensure as safe an environment as possible for schools, students, staff and host families, students are strongly encouraged to get tested for COVID-19 on their arrival in Malta. The public health authorities would facilitate this process if properly organized by the ELT Council or FELTOM.

Structure

Proper indoor ventilation is essential. In order to ensure adequate circulation of air, and to reduce the level of pathogens in the air, windows should be remained open throughout the day to allow for cross ventilation. If air-conditioning is to be used, this should be used in accordance with the guidelines issued by Public Health. Filters should always be cleaned well and maintained properly.

All precautions must be taken to ensure that water systems are safe to prevent the risk of infections derived from water such as Legionnaire's disease. If the water supply is direct from the mains, flushing of the water system by opening all taps for a few minutes should suffice. If the supply of water is through a roof tank, the roof tank should be emptied and cleaned and when the tank is re-filled the entire water system is flushed through for a few minutes. It is important that the water heater temperature is raised to 60°C. In this case, there is no need to take samples and get approval from the Environmental Health Directorate. If the centre forms part of a larger complex or building and the water supply is through the complex or building main water system, please follow the procedure indicated in Annex 1. You may consult with the Directorate of Environmental Health for further information and advice¹.

¹ mhi@gov.mt ; Tel: 21337333

General Guidelines- Reception/Administration

- ✓ The maximum number of students allowed on the premises and in each classroom should be exhibited at the entrance of the school and of each classroom.
- ✓ An adequate physical distance between persons should be kept at all times and unessential physical contact of any nature should be avoided.
- ✓ Any staff member or student exhibiting signs or symptoms suggestive of COVID should be refused entry.
- ✓ Temperature screening of students and staff should take place at the entrance with anyone with a fever of 37.2°C or more being turned away.
- ✓ An isolation room should be considered for any student who is unwell to isolate in until he/she can be accompanied out of the school.
- ✓ Enhanced cleaning and hygiene measures need to be applied in the schools. Frequently touched such as door handles, light switches, reception desks need to be cleaned even more frequently at least every hour.
- ✓ Perspex screens need to be installed in reception area and at sinks within toilet area or at any other location where an appropriate physical distance cannot be maintained. This screen needs to be installed at a 2 meter height in places where it is necessary.
- ✓ Ideally, the common areas should be organized for there to be a one-way flow of staff and students.
- ✓ Visible signage regarding cough etiquette, maintaining an adequate physical distance from others and appropriate hand washing techniques should be available in public areas for all to see. In order to avoid crowding of students to encourage electronic means of sorting out administrative queries, booking and payment.
- ✓ It is recommended that class times are staggered in order for arrival and departure of different groups to be staggered and avoid crowding of students.
- ✓ Toilets should have the hand driers disconnected in order to avoid dispersion of viral particles and instead disposable paper towels should be supplied.
- ✓ It is recommended that staff worked rosters where they are assigned to the same group/s of students as much as possible. It is not recommended that staff work in more than one ELT school.

Classrooms

- ✓ Students need to maintain an adequate distance between themselves whilst sitting in their chair.
- ✓ Students should all face in the same direction and none should be facing each other.
- ✓ During the lessons it is very important that there is no unnecessary contact between students or between students and staff members takes place.
- ✓ Timing and schedule of lessons should be such that where possible the same group of students would always have lessons and break times together with no mixing or shuffling between groups.
- ✓ Where rotation of classroom is inevitable, area should be sanitised by the student prior to settling into the lesson.
- ✓ Ideally those students who reside together are also placed in the class together in order to avoid unnecessary mixing between different groups. This applies to both classroom activities and also recreational activities which take place after hours.
- ✓ It must be pointed out that the more one can restrict the circle of contacts of each individual to a circumspect group at all times both during lessons and outside, the less the number of persons who would need to be quarantined should there be a person positive for COVID-19 within the group.
- ✓ Wherever possible the use of outdoor space and other spaces is encouraged.

Common Areas

Common functional rooms should be used alternately between groups and not simultaneously. These need to be then cleaned appropriately prior to being used by another group. In the case of a library, since evidence has shown that coronavirus can live on the surfaces for a few hours to a few days, it would be advisable not to allow lending of books outside the library.

If the common room includes a computer room, then the shared computer equipment should be cleaned and disinfected using an appropriate agent. Either the computers are placed at an adequate distance from each other or else Perspex screens are to be installed at a height of 2 meters can be erected.

If there are any cafeterias within the premises, these need to follow the MTA and Public Health guidelines.

Cleaning

In general, the infectivity of coronaviruses on inanimate surfaces (such as wood, metal, fabrics and plastic) decreases rapidly depending on the material and environmental conditions such as temperature, humidity and UV radiation. The cleaning of surfaces remains an important measure to ensure hygienic conditions.

Premises and resources will be sanitised daily using approved products. A combination of cleaning and disinfection will be most effective in removing the COVID-19 virus. Both cleaning and disinfection is most effective, using a combination of household detergents and disinfectants. A detergent is designed to break up oil and grease with the use of water. Anything labelled as a detergent will work. Cleaning should start with the dirtiest surface first, progressively moving towards the cleanest surface. When surfaces are cleaned, they should be left as dry as possible to reduce the risk of slips and falls, as well as spreading of viruses and bacteria through droplets. Disinfecting means using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces.

It is important to clean before disinfecting because dirt and grime can reduce the ability of disinfectants to kill germs. Disinfectants containing $\geq 70\%$ alcohol, ammonium compounds, chlorine bleach or oxygen bleach are suitable for use on hard surfaces (surfaces where liquids pool, and do not soak in). The packaging or manufacturer's instructions will outline the correct way to use disinfectant. Disinfectants require time to be effective at killing viruses. If no time is specified, the disinfectant should be left for ten minutes before removing.

Toilets must be cleaned regularly, at least three times a day. Toilet seats, fittings, washbasins and floors must be cleaned. In case of contamination with faces, blood or vomit, prophylactic wipe disinfection is required after removal of the contamination with a disposable cloth soaked in disinfectant. Protective gloves and mouth and nose protection must be worn by members of staff.

The following areas should be cleaned particularly thoroughly and, if possible, several times a day in heavily frequented areas:

- Door handles and any other handles on drawers, windows, etc.
- Stairs and handrails,
- Light switches,
- Tables, phones,

- Reception desks
- and all other grip areas.

Protocol regarding suspicion of sick student

Procedures in accordance with health authorities have to be implemented if:

Case A: Fever at screening

Any member of staff or student is found to have fever over 37.2°C or other symptoms when trying to attend the School.

In this case the staff member/student would be refused entry to the premises and advised to return home. If symptoms are suggestive of COVID-19, then they are strongly advised to call 111 to get tested.

They should remain home until symptoms have completely resolved even if the result of the swab test does not detect COVID-19

Case B: Any member of staff or student result in having fever or developing other symptoms during care.

The person who develops any symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 would need to isolate him/herself and leave the premises as quickly as possible. Ideally a room designated an isolation room is identified for this purpose. Staff are to call 111 for advice regarding whether they require to get tested. Staff and students who have symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 are strongly advised to call 111 and arrange for testing.

In the case of a potential COVID-19 infection, the School is to inform the Public Health authorities.

Case C: Plan to follow if someone is or becomes sick.

- Plan to have an isolation room (such as office) or area that can be used to isolate a sick staff or student.
- Disinfect the rooms which the staff member or student would have come into contact with whilst symptomatic
- If a sick person has been isolated in your facility, clean and disinfect surfaces in your isolation room or area after the individual has gone home.

If COVID-19 is **confirmed** in a student or staff member, the School will be contacted by Public Health and direction will be provided:

- ✓ Close off areas used by the person who is sick.
- ✓ Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the areas.
- ✓ Wait 24 hours before you clean and disinfect or the longest you possibly can.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect all areas used by the person who is sick, such as offices, bathrooms, and common areas using protective personal equipment
- ✓ Ensure that high touch areas are also thoroughly cleaned with the correct agents for cleaning and disinfection.
- ✓ Vacuum the space if necessary with a vacuum with a HEPA filter ideally. Turn off fans/ air circulation whilst cleaning to ensure that potentially infected particles do not circulate throughout the facility.
- ✓ If 7 days have elapsed from when the sick person visited the facility there is no need for enhanced cleaning over the routine cleaning and disinfection.

Annex 1

Note: This annex applies only to those ELT Schools which are part of a complex or building has not been in use for more than 4 weeks. Consult with Directorate of Environmental Health for further information and advice.

The following are the legal requirements to be carried out on the water systems prior re-opening of the premises:

1. Carry out a full system disinfection of the cold-water system, flushing through to all outlets to achieve 50 mg/l free chlorine for at least an hour checking that this level is achieved at the furthest outlets. This may be also achieved by making uses e.g. 5 mg/l for 10 hours (this all depends on the water piping system condition). It is important to top up when required throughout this process;
2. Flush out and refill the system to achieve maximum normal operating target levels of disinfection (equivalent to at least 0.2 mg/l free chlorine);
3. Refill and carry out a thermal shock by raising the temperature of the whole of the contents of the hot water storage heater from 70°C to 80°C then circulating this water throughout the system for up to three days. To be effective, the capacity and temperature of the hot water storage heater should be sufficient to ensure that the temperatures at the taps and appliances do not fall below 65°C. Each tap and appliance should be run sequentially for at least five minutes at the full temperature, taking appropriate precautions to minimise the risk of scalding;
4. Monitor temperatures and biocide levels where applicable, adjust where necessary, for at least 48-72 hours and then take Legionella samples from sentinel outlets (microbiological samples taken before 48 hours following disinfection may give false negative results);
5. Ensure you keep all documentation for inspection by the Competent Authority, including the review and update of the risk assessment manual including monitoring data, etc., with evidence of who carried out the monitoring, add time, date and signature;
6. Laboratory results for Legionella analysis which have to be carried out at an accredited laboratory, together with all the necessary documentation referred to in point 5 above and a declaration from the private water consultant under whom this water

system treatment has been carried out are to be sent to the Water Regulatory and Auditing Unit within the Environmental Health Directorate prior reopening of the establishment;

7. Once it is found that your systems of the hot and cold water are under control then the establishment can reopen.