

# Key Messages for Safe School Operations

In Countries with Outbreaks of Ebola

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# Introduction

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the World Health Organization (WHO) developed this document about safe school operations to help West African ministries of health and education reopen schools closed because of the Ebola outbreak. Reopening schools involves many challenges, but will benefit children, their families and communities, and the entire country. It also offers students an opportunity to help fight the outbreak by joining school efforts and sharing what they learn about staying safe with their friends and family. The document includes:

- Principles for safely reopening schools
- Key messages for community members about what they need to know and do to keep schools safe and the children attending school healthy

The following basic principles can help keep students, teachers, and staff safe at school and help stop the spread of Ebola in West Africa. Recommendations for healthy schools are based on a few main principles:

- Sick students, teachers, and staff should not come to school
- Schools should encourage frequent hand washing and daily disinfection and cleaning of school surfaces
- Schools should discourage physical contact
- Schools should follow national and local Ebola and safe school environment guidance, including separating sick people and telling local health officials if someone appears to be sick with Ebola

Additional resources can be found on:

- CDC's [Communication Products for West African Audiences](#) page
- UNICEF's [Ebola](#) page
- WHO's [Ebola](#) page

# Key Messages: School Administrators

## **Basic principles**

Following basic principles can help keep students, teachers, and staff safe at school and help stop the spread of Ebola in West Africa. Recommendations for healthy schools are based on a few main principles:

- Sick students, teachers, and staff should not come to school
- Schools should encourage frequent hand washing and daily disinfection and cleaning of school surfaces
- Schools should discourage physical contact
- Schools should follow national and local Ebola and safe school environment guidance, including separating sick people and telling local health officials if someone appears to be sick with Ebola

## **Facts about Ebola**

**Know the facts about Ebola and help prevent the spread of rumors.**

- Ebola is a dangerous disease that can spread by:
  - Contact with blood, pee, poop, vomit, diarrhea, or other fluids of a person who is sick with or has died from Ebola
  - Touching objects dirty with the body fluids of a sick person (like bandages, mattresses, clothes or utensils)
  - Handling uncooked bush meats, such as chimpanzees, gorillas, fruit bats, monkeys, forest antelope, and porcupines, although during an outbreak, the main risk is contact with a person with Ebola
- A person can only spread Ebola when he or she is sick
- Early treatment improves the chances of surviving Ebola
- Someone who has survived Ebola is not contagious through any type of casual contact and would not be able to spread the virus to people through school activities

Signs and symptoms of Ebola include:

- |             |                                    |
|-------------|------------------------------------|
| ▪ Fever     | ▪ Vomiting                         |
| ▪ Headache  | ▪ Stomach pain                     |
| ▪ Tiredness | ▪ Muscle pain                      |
| ▪ Diarrhea  | ▪ Unexplained bleeding or bruising |

Ebola symptoms can be similar to symptoms from other infections. Most illnesses and fevers are not caused by Ebola.

## Key steps

School administrators can help keep their schools safe for everybody. Here are the key steps to make sure this happens:

- **Choose your school's "Ebola Response Leader(s)"**

This person or team will lead planning and responding to any Ebola-related issues that arise. Choose someone who understands how your school works and how to prevent Ebola and who can work well with school staff, parents, health authorities, and communities. The Ebola Response Leader or another identified focal person will act as a point of contact with local health authorities to ensure that national Ebola and safe school guidance and protocols are implemented and followed. Provide them with the time, knowledge, capacity, equipment, and authority to fill this role.
- **Plan for Ebola**

Plan for both general health and safety measures and how to handle suspected cases of Ebola. Whenever possible, include your local health authorities in your planning. Your plans should fit with country guidance, circumstances at your school, and the recommendations in this document. Depending on your country guidance, you may have to regularly ask if children and staff members have had recent contact with a patient with Ebola, a person who died from Ebola, or a person who died with Ebola-like symptoms. Review your plans every few weeks to decide if they need to be updated or revised.
- **Provide equipment and supplies**

Provide equipment and supplies, like thermometers, hand washing stations, soap, chlorine, and gloves. Be sure you have these available and that staff are appropriately trained for using the equipment before your school reopens.
- **Prepare teachers, staff, parents, students, and the community for the school reopening**

Students, teachers, and staff have been out of school for many months. In addition to your general preparations for opening schools, make sure that everyone understands how to stay safe and healthy at school. Let them know what your school has done and will do to lower the chances of anyone catching Ebola. Many students and staff may have family, friends, and co-workers who have died of Ebola, and may need help and support. Resources from UNICEF, CDC, and WHO can help.
- **Regularly tell your teachers, staff, parents, students, and the community about the school's Ebola precautions and any incidents**

Students, teachers, staff, parents, and the community will continue to have questions even after school has begun. Providing regular information about Ebola safety, even if you have nothing new to share, will help them remain confident that the school is taking Ebola prevention seriously, and that the school is safe.

## Who cannot come to school

Anyone who has fever or symptoms consistent with Ebola should follow national guidelines and wait until they are well before returning to school.

National Ebola and safe school environment guidance should be consulted to decide if children who have come in contact with patients with Ebola in the last 21 days but are not sick should attend school or remain at home.

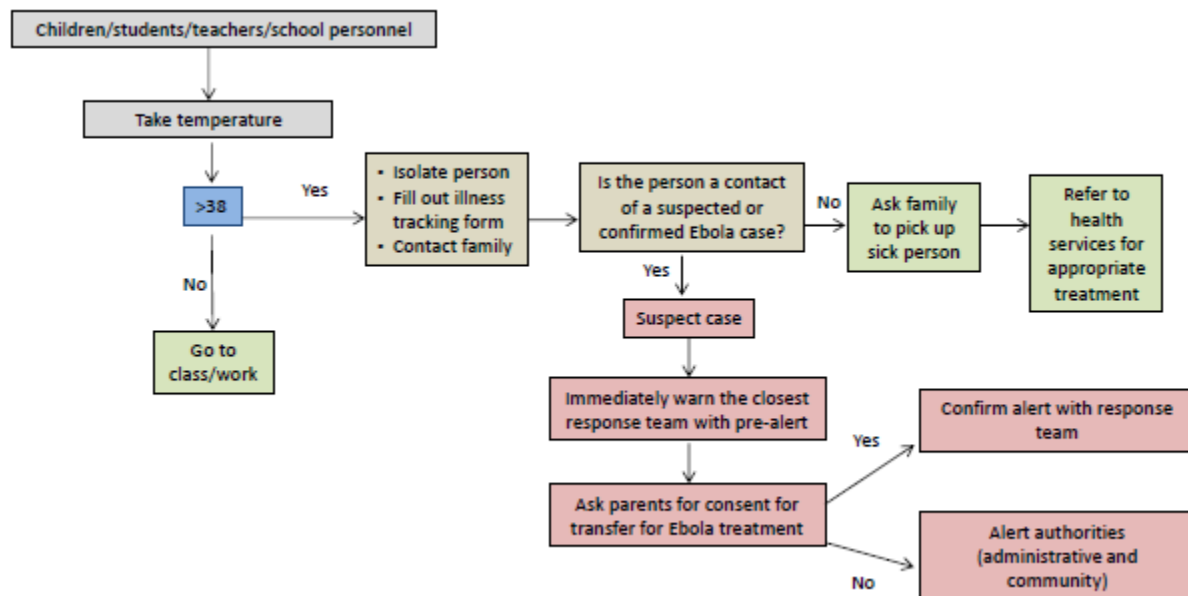
## Screening for fever

Some schools may choose to screen everybody for fever as they enter the school, either every day, or on a regular schedule.

- Schools will need non-contact thermometers and extra time will be necessary to perform the screening for fevers.
- Schools should make sure that screening staff know how to take a temperature accurately and regular refresher training should be provided.
- Schools should plan in advance how to handle students or staff with fever.

This diagram shows one way to use temperature results to determine who should go to class, who should be sent home, and when Ebola response teams should be alerted.

### Fever Screening (example)



## If a person gets sick during the day

- Isolate the person with symptoms of Ebola away from other students, teachers, or staff: keep a distance of 1 meter (3 feet) or more between the person with symptoms and others.

- Check his or her temperature with a non-contact thermometer.
- Consult national guidance to decide how to handle anyone who only has a fever (no other symptoms).
- Follow your national Ebola and safe school environment guidance on how to handle anyone with other symptoms of Ebola, including when a sick person can return to school after symptom monitoring has ended.
- Know the referral facilities in your area.
- Use gloves and clean and disinfect the area according to cleaning guidance once the person leaves.

**Note:** Most fevers will be caused by something other than Ebola, like malaria.

# Key Messages: Teachers and School Staff

## **Facts about Ebola**

**Know the facts about Ebola and help prevent the spread of rumors.**

- Ebola is a dangerous disease that can spread by:
  - Contact with blood, pee, poop, vomit, diarrhea or other fluids of a person who is sick with or has died from Ebola
  - Touching objects dirty with the body fluids of a sick person (like bandages, mattresses, or clothes)
  - Handling uncooked bush meats, such as chimpanzees, gorillas, fruit bats, monkeys, forest antelope, and porcupines, although during an outbreak, the main risk is contact with a person with Ebola
- Early treatment improves the chances of surviving Ebola
- Someone who has survived Ebola is not contagious through any type of casual contact and would not be able to spread the virus to people through school activities

Signs and symptoms of Ebola include:

- |             |                                    |
|-------------|------------------------------------|
| ▪ Fever     | ▪ Vomiting                         |
| ▪ Headache  | ▪ Stomach pain                     |
| ▪ Tiredness | ▪ Muscle pain                      |
| ▪ Diarrhea  | ▪ Unexplained bleeding or bruising |

Ebola symptoms can look like other diseases that spread from person to person. Most illnesses and fevers will be caused by something other than Ebola.

To keep yourself and your school safe, be sure you understand:

- Your school's plans for keeping everybody safe and healthy
- What you should do if there is a sick student or staff member

## **What you should do**

- Stay home if you are sick – seek medical help right away if it may be Ebola and inform your school administration
- Follow your school's plan for a healthy school
- Follow your school's plan if you, a student, or fellow staff member feel sick

## **Tell students**

- Treat everybody with respect – no teasing about Ebola
- Stay home if you are sick and get treatment if it may be Ebola
- Do not touch people who are sick or who have died
- Answer students' questions if you know the answers. Ask health officials if you don't know the answers.



## Helping students who may have lost loved ones or survived Ebola

The Ebola outbreak has been a scary experience, particularly for children. Some children may have had parents, family, and caregivers who were sick or died. You can help students cope by:

- Helping them to feel normal – opening schools is an important step!
- Allowing students to express their feelings with you or other students.
- Gently correcting untrue statements about Ebola, Ebola survivors, and those who lost family members. These students and their family members have survived a dangerous illness and pose no risk to other people through casual contact.

## Hand washing

Washing hands with soap and water is one of the most important ways to help everybody stay healthy at school. Hand washing should be regularly included in student schedules and students should be taught the correct way to wash and air dry their hands.

*Children should always wash their hands:*

- When arriving at school, before entering the classroom
- After using the toilet
- Before and after eating
- After play breaks
- After touching tears, snot, spit, blood, sweat, pee, poop, or vomit

*Teachers and staff members should always wash their hands:*

- When arriving at school, before beginning to work
- Before preparing food, eating, or helping children eat
- After using the toilet or helping a child to use the toilet
- After blowing his or her nose or helping a child blow his or her nose
- After contact with any tears, snot, spit, blood, sweat, pee, poop, or vomit

## No touch

- Space the children out in the classroom (or outdoors) – try to keep children separated by an arm's length, if possible
- Tell students not to share cups, eating utensils, or food
- Do not let students eat items that fell on the floor or chew on pencils or other objects
- Avoid close contact, like shaking hands or kissing

# Key Messages: Parents and Community Members

## **Facts about Ebola**

**Know the facts about Ebola and help prevent the spread of rumors.**

- Ebola is a dangerous disease that can spread by:
  - Contact with blood, pee, poop, vomit, diarrhea or other fluids of a person who is sick with or has died from Ebola
  - Touching objects dirty with the body fluids of a sick person (like bandages, mattresses, or clothes)
  - Handling uncooked bush meats, such as chimpanzees, gorillas, fruit bats, monkeys, forest antelope, and porcupines, although during an outbreak, the main risk is contact with a person with Ebola
- A person can only spread Ebola when he or she is sick
- Early treatment improves the chances of surviving Ebola
- Someone who has survived Ebola is not contagious through any type of casual contact and would not be able to spread the virus to people through school activities

Signs and symptoms of Ebola include

- Fever
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Muscle pain
- Unexplained bleeding or bruising

Ebola symptoms can look like other diseases that spread from person to person. Most illnesses and fevers will not be caused by Ebola.

## **Body fluids which can transmit Ebola:**

- Body fluids are blood, spit, tears, pee, poop, vomit, snot, semen, and breast milk. Any of these body fluids may carry Ebola virus.
- Avoid touching body fluids from another person, and wash your hands after helping a child with blowing his or her nose or using the toilet.

## How your school is keeping your child safe

Schools are taking key steps to protect the health and safety of students, teachers, and staff. This includes:

- No one is allowed to come to school if he or she is sick or has symptoms of Ebola
- If anyone gets sick at school, the school will put him or her in a separate room until he or she gets help from a health worker
- The school is being cleaned and disinfected daily
- Everyone is encouraged to wash his or her hands often
- Students are discouraged from touching one another and from sharing cups, eating utensils and food.

### What you can do to help make safe, healthy schools

- Keep your child home if he or she does not feel well
- Get or ask for medical help if you or your child has any Ebola symptoms, including fever, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, unexplained bleeding or bruising, and muscle pain
- Get involved in your school's parent organization or school management committee

## Keep your child safe and healthy

- Keep your child home if he or she is sick
- If you or your child has any Ebola symptoms, call your local health authorities and inform school administration services.
- Make sure your child is washing his or her hands before eating, after using the toilet, and before leaving school
- Tell your child not to share cups, eating utensils, food or drinks with other children
- Tell your child to tell teachers if he or she feels sick
- Use bed nets to help prevent malaria

# Key Messages: Students and Other Children

*Children and young people have an important role to play in helping prevent Ebola. Together we can fight Ebola.*

## **What you should know**

- Ebola is a dangerous disease that can spread by
  - Contact with blood, pee, poop, vomit, diarrhea or other fluids of a person who is sick with or has died from Ebola
  - Touching objects dirty with the body fluids of a sick person (like bandages, mattresses or clothes)
  - Handling uncooked bush meats, such as chimpanzees, gorillas, fruit bats, monkeys, forest antelope, and porcupines, although during an outbreak, the main risk is contact with a person with Ebola
- You can keep yourself safe
- Understand what you should do if there is a sick student or teacher at your school

## **What you should do**

- Tell your parents, family, or caregiver if you feel sick, and stay home if you are sick
- Share what you learn about preventing Ebola with your family and friends and especially with younger children
- Always wash your hands with soap and water and remind family and friends to wash their hands
- Do not share cups, eating utensils, food or drinks with other children or chew on pencils or other objects
- Use kind words to comfort sick people but remember not to touch them until you know that they do not have Ebola
- Follow your teacher's instructions on staying healthy for a healthy school
- Ask your teachers if you have questions about Ebola

## **What you can tell other students**

- Do not tease anyone about Ebola
- Stay home if you are sick and seek treatment if it may be Ebola
- Do not touch people who are sick or who have died
- Encourage fellow students to wash their hands with soap and water often
- Ask our teachers if you have questions about Ebola

# Frequently Asked Questions for School Administrators

## **What should be in our school Ebola prevention plans?**

Here are some important things for schools to consider:

### *General Plan*

- Admission policy
- Health and fever screening policy
- Cleaning and disinfection plan and schedule
- Hand washing plan and schedule
- Teacher and staff training
- Parent information
- Student education
- An identified focal person to act as point of contact with local health authorities

### *Sick Plan*

- Isolation plan for sick students or staff
- Parent notification plan
- Contact information for local health authorities and referral plan

## **What extra supplies does our school need for reopening?**

Below are items that schools should have available to open safe and healthy schools. The amount needed will depend on the size of your school.

- Thermometer: non-contact thermometer with backup batteries (and backup non-contact thermometer)
- Latex gloves
- Hand washing facilities and hand washing stations: if not available, an improvised [tippy tap](#) can be made
  - Soap
  - Water
- Latrines for females and males with jerry cans
- Cleaning supplies and protective gear
  - Gloves (heavy rubber and inner gloves, if available)
  - Chlorine
  - Rubber boots
  - Aprons
  - Face masks or shields

### **What do we do if our school has no clean water?**

Schools without a clean water supply should make a plan to get water. Parents, families, and communities should be encouraged to provide clean water to schools for hand washing with soap.

If soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be procured. The school's Ebola focal person can work with local health authorities to ensure that hand sanitizer meets required international standards. As a temporary measure, 0.05% chlorine solution may be used (see [posters](#) about how to make 0.05% chlorine solution), when hands are visibly dirty.

### **What should I do if a student who has been in school is determined by health authorities to have Ebola?**

In these situations, you must follow national Ebola and safe school environment guidance for contacts of Ebola cases (people who may have been exposed to a person with Ebola). The process may depend on the level of exposure that occurred between the child with Ebola and others within the school. Contacts of the sick child will require monitoring if the child with Ebola was at the school while he or she was sick.

For contacts of a child or staff member with Ebola, you and the health authorities will determine if those who had contact with the student can attend school during the monitoring period or if the school can remain open.

### **What training should teachers receive for Ebola?**

Training will depend on the local context and available resources. Schools will want teachers to be able to play their role in Ebola prevention in schools, as well as answer questions from students and provide reassurance. Possible training topics include:

- What is Ebola? How does it spread?
- How to prevent Ebola in schools
- How to detect and manage suspected Ebola cases at school
- How to provide psychosocial support to children
- Referral mechanisms to health and child protection services
- Guidelines from the Ministry of Education concerning Ebola and schools
- The role of teachers and education personnel in the Ebola response
- How to mix chlorine solution for general cleaning
- How to use personal protective equipment, if needed

In some areas of the Ebola outbreak, teachers have been involved in Ebola prevention efforts. Trained teachers could be encouraged to serve as peer educators in their schools.

## What should we do if our school has been used for Ebola patient care while it was closed?

In this situation, school facilities will require thorough cleaning and decontamination according to national protocols, before opening. A school community meeting could be held to explain why the school is being cleaned and that, after cleaning, a school is safe to open. Targeted social mobilization messages can be disseminated within the community before schools reopen and thereafter.

## How should we clean and disinfect spills from body fluids (blood, pee, poop, spit, vomit)?

### Identify and train appropriate staff to use proper procedures to clean and disinfect spills from body fluids

- Do **not** touch any body fluids with your bare hands or skin.
- When you are cleaning places where someone has been sick, **always** wear protective clothing (heavy duty rubber gloves, inner gloves, a gown, a plastic apron, and rubber boots), or other personal protective equipment. If available, also use face masks or shields.
- Spills or waste including blood, other body fluids, secretions or excretions should be removed, and cleaned and disinfected as follows:
  - Place a clean rag or paper towel or absorbent pad over the spill to avoid splashes or dispersion of fluids
  - Remove organic material using rag, paper towel or absorbent pad by always starting from the cleanest area first and moving towards dirtiest area last
  - Discard in plastic bag for infected waste, including the rag or paper towel or absorbent pad, and burn the bag
  - Wash area with soap and water
  - Disinfect with 0.5% chlorine solution and allow to dry for 15 minutes.
- Remove personal protective equipment using proper procedures (see steps below).
- Dispose of or clean (if reusable) protective equipment following national Ebola and safe school environment guidance.
- If locally prepared, cleaning and disinfectant solutions should be freshly prepared every day.

### After Cleaning is Complete - These steps should be done in order:

1. Wash your gloved hands with 0.5% chlorine solution.
2. Remove washed rubber gloves and put in a bucket with 0.5% chlorine solution for 30 minutes.
3. Wash your hands with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available. If wearing inner gloves, wash the inner pair of gloves with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available.
4. If apron is re-usable, remove it and place in the same bucket as the rubber gloves. If apron is not re-usable, dispose of it safely.
5. Wash your hands with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available. If wearing inner gloves, wash the inner pair of gloves with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available.
6. Use a clean towel soaked with 0.5% chlorine solution to clean your shoes/boots.

7. Wash your hands with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available. If wearing inner gloves, wash the inner pair of gloves with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available.
8. Remove waterproof gown and dispose of it safely.
9. Wash your hands with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available. If wearing inner gloves, wash the inner pair of gloves with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available.
10. If wearing a head cover, remove it by grasping with fingers near back of head and dispose of it safely.
11. Wash your hands with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available. If wearing inner gloves, wash the inner pair of gloves with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available.
12. If wearing goggles, remove without touching the front of the goggles and place in the bucket with the rubber gloves.
13. Wash your hands with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available. If wearing inner gloves, wash the inner pair of gloves with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available.
14. If wearing mask, remove the mask using the ties or bands and dispose of it safely.
15. Wash your hands with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available. If wearing inner gloves, wash the inner pair of gloves with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available.
16. Remove the boots and place them in the bucket with the gloves.
17. Wash your hands with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available. If wearing inner gloves, wash the inner pair of gloves with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution if soap and water are not available.
18. Remove your inner gloves and dispose of them safely.
19. Wash your hands with soap and water or with 0.05% chlorine solution after removing your inner pair of gloves.

### **How should we handle injuries with bleeding?**

Just like in other situations without Ebola risk, you should always avoid touching an injured person's blood. Provide the injured person with help and refer him or her to a medical clinic if needed. Use gloves and wash your hands before and after treating the injured person.

### **What should teachers do if a student is an Ebola survivor and is being teased?**

Teasing can often be a result of fear. Children may be fearful of Ebola and may worry about getting Ebola from survivors. To reduce this stigma, address the fear as normal, provide facts about Ebola, and tell students they can ask questions but that teasing will not be tolerated.

Teachers should speak with all students about Ebola as soon as schools open, including inappropriate behavior like teasing, making fun of, or leaving others out. This should be said often, and some situations may need direct attention. Because students will respond to the painful events they have experienced in many different ways, teachers' skills at understanding their students, and providing healthy coping skills, will be especially important.



## What about food?

Rules that were in place before Ebola precautions will continue to be important. Food vendors at schools should be regulated. Bush meat should be avoided, as preparing bush meat can put you at risk for Ebola and it is difficult to know if prepared meat has been safely cooked. Wash thoroughly all cooking and eating utensils after someone uses them. In addition, providing school lunches, when possible, can help improve children's health, especially those children who are not able to eat as much as they should at home, and can make food-related illnesses in schools less likely.

## Where can I find additional resources?

- CDC's [Communication Products for West African Audiences](#) page
- UNICEF's [Ebola](#) page
- WHO's [Ebola](#) page
  - [Guideline on hand hygiene in health care](#) in the context of filovirus disease outbreak response. Rapid advice guideline. World Health Organization, Geneva, 2014.
  - [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance](#) for Care of Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Filovirus Haemorrhagic Fever in Health-Care Settings, with Focus on Ebola. World Health Organization, Geneva, December 2014.