



Position Statement for In-person reopening of Early Childhood Care and Education settings

Wait, Watch, Prepare, Respond

We see an increasing demand that schools open for in-persons pre-schooling or offline while we are still in the pandemic not in a post-pandemic situation. Some states have taken the decision to reopen as well. There is guidance in different quarters, medical and academic that is stating that schools were closed unnecessarily, since children don't get sick and schools don't contribute to Covid's spread. There is available evidence that suggests that early learning programs are not associated with increased risk of contracting COVID-19 *when* stringent health and safety precautions are in place and hence one can [safely reopen schools](#). There is also palpable despair because it's been over **70 weeks** of no school and scattered and developmentally inappropriate remote learning for younger children. This may lead to disastrous "[learning loss](#)" for an entire generation of students particularly for at-risk students from low-income families or children who are in a better off state in institutions than in their homes or neighbourhoods. There is no denial in that reality which will need exacting measures to counter.

But there are errors in judgement about the [science and emerging evidence](#) — schools *do* contribute to community spread. Early in the pandemic, people observed that children didn't get sick as readily as adults. Children were tested much less often than adults. Asymptomatic spread was unknown or uncertain and most importantly children were at home.

But now, [evidence on children transmitting covid-19](#) points out much more on the spread than not; on the emerging [Delta Variant](#) infecting children globally as well adds to the worries.

Therefore, it is AECED's obligation to guide appropriately as a network that we need to follow a very cautious approach and tread with greater precaution and prevention towards the reopening of our institutes of education and care for Early years.

Therefore, taking cognizance of the learning loss debate, the teacher being the implementor of protocols and innovative pedagogies in the continued pandemic state and ably supported by the system and community, we propose a '**Wait, Watch, Prepare, Respond**' approach in the reopening of our ECCE settings.

WAIT

- Covid19 Virus had brought the whole world to a standstill...despite huge financial loss the lockdown continued to safeguard the lives of people. Only now after vaccination of individuals there is permission for people to start working offline.
- Our children are the future of the nation and our responsibility towards advocacy for their wellbeing is of utmost importance
- There have been reports of some health organizations claiming that the children have inbuilt immunity toward the Virus..... however there are research findings and instances indicating that children too can get affected....
- Currently there is no vaccination available for the children...a lot more research is required to understand this grey area
- Also the threat of Wave 3 in the months of sept-oct is suspected
- The past months we have observed that the virus had mutated becoming more dangerous and attacking younger population. Very little is known in this area
- Considering all this it is best to wait rather than putting children at risk

WATCH

- Some countries with advanced facilities have started...stopped and restarted schools despite availability of high quality infrastructure, protocol implementation support and trained personnel's.
- A developing country with such a vast population like ours and complexity of very diverse settings and challenges, must watch how the virus unfolds for at least the next 3 months before taking any action on reopening schools offline.
- Let's watch who and how the 3rd wave impacts. Children not going to school for another 3 months will not bring the economy or world to a standstill

PREPARE

- As we wait and watch we can start the process of preparing for schools to open off line.
- This is a enormous task involving vaccination... training.....developing infrastructure.....scheduling etc
- Advocacy has continued at varied levels but as a system readiness, we're far from ready
- System, spaces, teachers, community preparation is a big ask and task and we're on a very short time availability to achieve this
- Continue building "home learning" efficacy through innovative and evidence based approaches

RESPOND

- Use the opportunity we have to transform the sector meaningfully
- Keeping teachers and caregivers at the fulcrum (if not they, then who) as the first responders and protocol executors, their work conditions, readiness, safety and care will need to be paramount.
- As networks we can utilise the next 3 months to respond with setting protocols (non-negotiable), trainings on protocols as well as the changed normal, model centre readiness, learn from exemplary practices etc
- Synergistic action is the key and the time is now to work towards a post diwali or post 2021 opening which should be reviewed in light of the covid status closer to the date.