



Education and **Pandemic Responses**



Education is essential during the response to a pandemic and the key to long-term recovery.

Strong and resilient education systems are one of the most helpful ways to prepare young people for shocks, disseminate accurate information about health and hygiene, deliver essential health services, and restore a sense of normalcy during crises. School networks can ensure young people, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable, are looked after and supported during ongoing challenges in their communities. Investing in quality and inclusive education during a pandemic helps a cohort of children to remain resilient, rebound after a crisis and be better prepared for the future.

Key challenges



- **School closures have economic costs.** Without immediate remedial education when school resumes, some estimates suggest today's cohort of learners could face a US\$10 trillion loss in future earnings over the next generation (World Bank, 2020).

- **For girls, being out of school increases the risk of child marriage, teen pregnancy, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and child labour.** During the Ebola outbreak, teen pregnancies in certain parts of Sierra Leone increased by 65%, which the students themselves directly attributed to school closure ([UNDP, 2015; Risso-Gill & Finnegan, 2015](#)).
- **Distance education requires innovative solutions to overcome the digital divide.** Only 47% of households in developing countries and 12% in the least developed countries have access to the Internet at home. Even in countries with wide Internet access, such as Italy, one in four households lack a strong enough connection to download and stream education content ([GEM, 2020](#)).

Make the case



- **Education is a priority for children.** In a survey of thousands of children across 17 emergency scenarios, 99% said education was a top priority ([Save the Children, 2015](#)).
- **Children want education.** During the Ebola crisis in 2014-2016, 71% children and youth said that what bothered them the most about the crisis was 'no school' ([Global Education Cluster, 2015](#)).
- **Education provides food security during times of disruption.** Around 350 million children worldwide (47% of them girls) depend on school meals as a source of their daily nutrition ([World Food Programme, 2020](#)).
- **Mental health services from schools during crises prevent irreversible damage from 'toxic stress'.** Every US dollar invested in social emotional learning interventions in schools can yield a return of US\$11 ([Education Cannot Wait, 2019; see Belfield et al., 2015](#)).
- **School is a critical place to disseminate important information about hygiene and public health.** In a meta-review of 38 studies, all the studies that examined changes in knowledge, attitudes, and hygiene behaviours reported positive change among children, such as hand-washing with soap ([McMichael, 2019](#)).

- **A little bit of education goes a long way during a pandemic.** When schools closed in Sierra Leone due to Ebola, a one-hour daily class for girls in life skills, sexual and reproductive health, and vocational learning was enough to reduce by half the rate of drop outs from school post-crisis ([Bandiera et al., 2018](#)).
- **Restoring education as quickly as possible helps children rebound.** Investment into education post-pandemic is especially important, given that children may lose more than a full year's worth of learning from a three-month closure if no special remediation measures are taken ([Kaffenberger, 2020](#)).
- **Investing in education helps build a strong public health workforce to combat future pandemics.** Without the immediate ramping up of education, there will be a shortage of 15 million health workers worldwide by 2030 ([Liu et al., 2017](#)).

Key infographic



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Key talking points



- At its peak, 1.6 billion students around the world were out of school due to Covid-19 (UN, 2020).
- During a pandemic, restoring some form of education as quickly and safely as possible is paramount.
- Restoring education has immediate benefits to the health and wellbeing of children.
- There are a variety of innovative ways to deliver education during a pandemic, ranging from distance instruction with radio, television and phones to online education and reduced capacity in-person instruction.
- Strong education systems promote growth, economic development and skills training, helping a country rebound more quickly from a pandemic.

FAQs



Q. If children can't go to school full time, is it worth bothering with alternative forms of education?

A. Education provides a sense of normalcy for children. Even one hour of instruction per day for girls in Sierra Leone made them much less likely to drop out of school when the recent pandemic ended. Even closing school for three months can set a child back more than one year of education if remedial measures are not taken.

Q. Surely missing a few months of school won't have a lasting impact?

A. Restoring education in a safe and healthy manner as soon as possible is extremely important for children. For many young people, school is a safe place to receive a healthy meal and be protected from toxic stress at home or, in more extreme cases, violence and neglect. Moreover, it's estimated that being out of school for just a few months may cost this cohort of children over US\$10 trillion in future earnings.