

Action Memo on Teachers and Vaccination as Part of School Operations

The Global Education Forum was established in 2019 to address challenges in the education financing architecture and develop greater collaboration between and coordination of education donors, and to advocate for investment and the acceleration of progress towards SDG4.

Based on the outcomes of the Global Education Forum meeting in September 2020 and the priorities identified in the COVID-19 recovery packages of the GEM and the Save Our Future White Paper, **the April 2021 Forum meeting will focus on a selected number of urgent Action Areas for the coming year as schools reopen and countries turn their attention to building back better in education.** The Action Areas for discussion in the April 2021 meeting include: School Health and Nutrition, Teachers and Vaccination as part of School Reopening, Foundational Learning, and Digital Learning for All.

To facilitate progress on each of these action areas, three Forum working groups have been established, led by Forum members (World Food Programme for School Health and Nutrition, World Bank for Foundational Learning, and UNICEF for Digital Learning) and including Forum members from bilateral and multilateral donors.

This special issue on teachers and vaccination was developed by the Technical Advisory Group of Experts on Educational Institutions and COVID-19, which is co-convened by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the WHO.

Introduction

In this Action Memo, we recommend proposals for effective donor investment and development partner engagement to support teachers and other school staff, including their prioritization for vaccination against COVID-19 aligned with the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) values framework for the allocation and prioritization of COVID-19 vaccination, and the WHO SAGE Roadmap for prioritizing uses of COVID-19 vaccines in the context of limited supply. The proposals were developed by the WHO, UNESCO and UNICEF who form the Secretariat for the co-convened Technical Advisory Group (TAG) of experts.¹

Efforts are underway in all regions to operate schools safely, building back with greater resiliency to ensure that in future crises schools will be in a better position to close last, and reopen first. This action memo considers support for teachers and other school staff for accelerated recovery in the education system, including their prioritization for COVID-19 vaccination consistent with the epidemiologic setting and vaccine supply scenarios. It proposes the following three actions for consideration by the Global Education Forum, which are to:

1. Increase funding for countries to implement recommended international guidance for safe school opening, in particular the [Framework for Reopening Schools](#) and [the Annex](#) to Considerations in adjusting public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19: Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19
2. Contribute or increase funding to COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX)
3. Join calls for teachers to be supported and prioritized for vaccination as essential workers, fully aligned to the SAGE Roadmap.

Why this matters to the education sector

The COVID-19 pandemic has strongly reminded us that teachers, through their presence in classrooms, not only educate learners but play a lynchpin role in the wellbeing and prosperity of the community. The world witnessed first-hand the knock-on effects that school closures have had, severing crucial linkages with social protection services that safeguard our most vulnerable young people, disadvantaging learners and families with special needs, and undermining the overall health and well-being of children and young people. In sum, supporting countries to take the necessary measures to protect teachers and facilitate their safe return to the classroom is a public good, a critical part of each country's social and economic recovery from COVID-19, and an urgent priority.

Recognition that teachers are indispensable essential workers during the COVID pandemic has been widely acknowledged, including through statements by the [UN Secretary-General](#) António

¹ This TAG has a core function of providing strategic and technical advice to the three UN agencies on matters relating to educational institutions and COVID-19 transmission, with a focus on evidence-based strategies and monitoring of the effects of these policies. TAG experts and the three co-convening UN Agencies meet once a month to discuss the latest evidence, and to consider the best strategies to be implemented. Supporting and prioritizing teachers and other education staff in COVID-19 vaccination campaigns has been a recurring theme during the monthly TAG sessions.

Guterres, [Deputy Secretary-General](#) Amina J. Mohammed, leadership of UNESCO and UNICEF, and in the WHO SAGE values framework for the allocation and prioritization of COVID-19 vaccination. UNESCO and Education International (EI) released a joint statement calling on governments and the international community to consider teachers and educators as a priority group in vaccination efforts. [In a joint video statement](#), UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay and Education International's General Secretary David Edwards underscored that "Reopening schools and education institutions safely and keeping them open as long as possible is an imperative. In this context, as we see positive developments regarding vaccination, we believe that teachers and education support personnel must be considered as a priority group." UNICEF's Executive Director Henrietta Fore [released a statement](#) calling for teachers to be prioritized to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, once frontline health personnel and high-risk populations are vaccinated, recognizing that "These are difficult decisions that force difficult trade-offs. But what should not be difficult is the decision to do everything in our power to safeguard the future of the next generation. This begins by safeguarding those responsible for opening that future up for them. Prioritizing teachers for the vaccine will help protect them from the virus, allow them to teach in person, and ultimately keep schools open".

What teachers and other school workers require to stay safe when schools reopen

International guidance has been developed to help decision-makers and planners take all possible measures to help keep teachers (and students) safe when schools are opened. The capacity of national education sectors to adequately implement the recommended measures varies by context, with some lower-middle-income countries (LMICs) struggling due to lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure including water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, and supply shortages.

The Framework for Reopening Schools presents six key dimensions that should be used by countries to assess their states of readiness and inform planning: policy, financing, safe operations, learning, reaching the most marginalized and wellbeing/protection. The Framework goes on to remind that policy considerations and financial requirements together create the enabling environment needed to support each of the other dimensions.

[The Annex to Considerations in adjusting public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19: Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19](#), produced jointly by WHO, UNICEF and UNESCO, recommends comprehensive, multi-layered measures to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in educational settings that include physical distancing where appropriate, age-appropriate wearing of masks where recommended, frequent hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, cleaning and disinfection, adequate ventilation, and spacing of desks or grouping of children if required.

Vaccinating teachers is an important complementary measure which will help keep them safe from community transmission of the virus. Teacher absenteeism due to COVID-19 contributes to school shutdowns, or decisions to send individual classes home, and to the burnout of remaining teachers who work hard to support additional students. By prioritizing teachers for the COVID-19 vaccine,

we will help to ensure teachers can continue to teach in-person – a critical step towards putting children’s education back on track.

In addition to being recommended in the context of COVID-19, these measures are also smart investments to keep teachers safe and healthy more generally. Whether it be COVID-19 or other infectious diseases, we need to invest to decrease the cost for individuals and for society of missed work and missed school.

Where do countries stand with regard to teacher vaccination?

In March 2021, one year into the COVID-19 crisis, UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 carried out [a global survey](#) to inquire whether and, if so, how countries were prioritizing teachers in national plans. Based on the latest data available ([please see the interactive map](#)), 111 of the 168 countries surveyed have officially prioritized teachers in vaccinations. Of these 111 countries, 19 acknowledge that they count teachers as a priority population for the first phase of their national vaccination plans. UNESCO, UNICEF and other partners continue to advocate for more countries to prioritize teachers as part of the first phase of their national vaccination plans. Teachers and vaccinations are also tracked regularly through the COVID-19 Global Education Recovery Tracker: <https://equityschoolplus.jhu.edu/global-tracker/>.

Guidelines and recommendations from WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE)

[WHO SAGE](#) is charged with advising WHO on overall global policies and strategies, ranging from vaccines and technology, research and development, to delivery of immunization and its linkages with other health interventions. In November 2020, based on [the WHO SAGE values framework for the allocation and prioritization of COVID-19 vaccination](#), WHO SAGE released a [Roadmap for prioritizing uses of COVID-19 vaccines in the context of limited supply](#). The document highlights several epidemiologic and vaccine supply scenarios, and implications for prioritizing teachers in national vaccination efforts.

Promoting equitable vaccine access through COVAX

COVAX, the vaccines pillar of the [Access to COVID-19 Tools \(ACT\) Accelerator](#), is co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance and WHO - working in partnership with UNICEF, developed and developing countries vaccine manufacturers, the World Bank and others. It is the only global initiative that is working with governments and manufacturers to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are available worldwide to both high-income and low-income countries. As of the 14th of April, 113 countries and territories have received their first dose shipments, with close to 40 million doses delivered². Countries such as Afghanistan, Cambodia,

2 For up-to-date information on vaccine delivery see [here](#)

Rwanda, The Gambia, Uganda, and Vietnam are among the low- and middle-income countries that have decided to prioritize teachers in their vaccination campaigns³.

With expanded funding, COVAX can make bigger strides in supporting the fair and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, ensuring that LMICs are not left out of this important global public good.

Securing a safer future for teachers and learners

This proposal argues for intensified support to teachers, and their prioritization for COVID-19 vaccination within national plans, consistent with the WHO-SAGE values framework, to ensure that learning never stops, and that all learners can benefit from in-person learning. It calls for donors to support countries to fully implement current recommendations to reopen schools and take all possible measures to keep them open safely. A key part of enabling in-person schooling to resume and avoid further disruption also includes making sure that COVID-19 vaccines are available to LMICs, thus a call to increase funding for COVAX.

³ For further details see [here](#) and [here](#)