The official government guide for the re-opening of schools

The government published this Tuesday the detailed rules explaining how the return to school will take place from 18 May - and also how schools should be disinfected. See below.

The Ministry of Education published this Tuesday two documents with the specific indications on how the return to classes will occur for the 11th and 12th grade students and on how disinfection should be carried out schools.

Guidelines published by the Ministry of Education include the recommendation that schools plan staggered schedules - holding some classes in the morning only, others in the afternoon only - and concentrate the timetable in order to reduce break times. At the same time, the Government gives concrete recommendations on how lessons should take place: the classrooms used should be the largest available, there should be no pupils facing each other and there should be only one pupil per desk.

When this is not possible, due to the size of the classes or classrooms, to respect the minimum distance, schools may choose to divide the classes into two groups. The Government also gives very specific guidelines on school disinfection. Classrooms should be disinfected "at the end of each period of use, whenever there is a change of class", while other common spaces will have to be cleaned more frequently.

1 - School organisation

- Define how teaching activities will occur, preferably between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., creating time gaps between classes, avoiding, as much as possible, the concentration of students, teachers and non-teaching staff in the school grounds, as well as in the most frequent period of school-to-home travel;

- Whenever possible, have back-to-back lessons in the different subjects in each class in order to avoid free periods between lessons;

- Whenever possible, concentrate the lessons of each class, preferably in the morning or afternoon;

- Whenever possible, concentrate as many lessons of each class as possible to minimise the number of times students have to go to school during the week;

- Give preference to the use of large and airy classrooms, seating one student per desk. The tables should be arranged facing the same way, avoiding an arrangement where students are facing each other;
• When the number of pupils in the class makes it unfeasible to comply with the rules of physical distance in the available spaces, the schools can double up the classes, making use of teachers with availability in their teaching component. If this or any other method is not feasible, the teaching load of the subjects taught in the classroom may be reduced by up to 50%, with moments of autonomous work being organised for the rest of the time;

• Whenever possible, the classes should be set up in classrooms at a distance from each other;

• The intervals between classes should be as short as possible, and students should, as a rule, remain inside the class;

• Define circulation routes and procedures within the school that promote physical distance between students, namely on the route from the entrance of the school to the classroom, at the accesses to the cafeteria, to the hall entrances and to the bathrooms, in order to avoid contact between students;

• Identify the routes to the isolation office/room according to the implemented Contingency Plan;

• Avoid concentration of students in the common spaces of the school;

• Create rules for the use of teaching and non-teaching staff rooms that promote physical distance;

• Close any services and other spaces not necessary for teaching (buffets/bars; support rooms; student common rooms and others);

• Spaces such as libraries and computer rooms should be reduced to a third of their maximum capacity and have signs indicating the places that can be occupied in order to guarantee the rules of physical distance;

• Give preference to digital means for all administrative procedures;

• Define procedures for the use of refectories, in particular with the following operating rules:
  • Lunch periods, whenever possible, staggered between classes, in order to respect the rules of distance and avoiding the concentration of students;
  • Washing/disinfecting of hands before and after the consumption of any meal by any user of the cafeteria, as well as mandatory use of a mask by the staff;
  • Preparation of the tray and delivery to each student by an employee at the entrance of the cafeteria line;
  • Cutlery and napkins must be supplied inside packaging;
- Exceptional care in the provision of food: mandatory packaging of fruit and dessert, salad properly protected, served by an employee.
- Machine wash all dishes, including trays, after each use;
- Clean tables after each use;
- Remove any decorative items from tables;
- Ensure good ventilation and air renewal.

- Keep the doors of the various rooms open where possible, and if possible, the windows, to avoid unnecessary touching of surfaces and to keep spaces airy;

- Create/reinforce health education teams in school groupings and schools that are not grouped, composed of teaching and non-teaching staff, in permanent collaboration with health centres (school health teams), parents' associations, students and others responsible for drawing up and coordinating their health plans;

- Ensure that only the human resources strictly necessary for the operation of on-site teaching activities (teaching and non-teaching staff) are present;

- If teachers of the subjects to be taught in person belong to a risk group, schools may adopt the following strategies:
  - Redistribution of teaching services;
  - Maintenance of the classes of that teacher in a remote system, and assistance in person should be ensured, and if necessary, the replacement mechanisms provided for and regulated in Decree-Law No 132/2012, as amended by Decree-Law No 28/2017, may be used, when it is necessary to safeguard the health of teachers subject to a special duty of protection, citing the aforementioned legal provision as the reason for replacement.
  - Schools may adopt other strategies that they deem to be more appropriate, particularly with regard to the replacement of teachers and locations of teaching activities, ensuring the greater effectiveness of measures to contain coronavirus.

2 – Attendance

- **Scientific-Humanities Courses**

  All classes where a national exam is on offer are held in person. Students attend class in these subjects, regardless of whether they take the respective exams. Pupils of other educational offers, particularly those in adult education, may take these subjects when they express the intention to elect the national final examinations as entrance examinations for higher education.

- **Professional and Artistic Education**

  Students attend, in person, the disciplines of the socio-cultural/general and scientific training component, with the same designation or with identical contents as those offered in the national
final exams of the scientific-humanities courses, regardless of having expressed the intention to elect the respective national final exams as proofs of entry to higher education.

Teaching and training activities may also be resumed in the classroom in subjects of a practical nature and in training in a work context when, namely because they require the use of specific spaces, instruments and equipment, they cannot occur through distance learning or simulated practice and compliance with the guidelines of the Directorate General of Health is guaranteed.

- **Distance learning**

All other disciplines continue to operate remotely. In the case of double certification offers, FCT should, whenever possible, be recovered next year, and modules of a less practical nature may be anticipated. In the case of the third year, final classifications may be weighted according to the combination of classifications awarded to previous FCT moments and/or to other technical and practical components of the training.

- **Attendance at classes**

  - Students’ attendance is recorded;
  - Students who do not attend classes in person, at the clear choice of the parents, have their absences justified and the school is not obliged to provide remote service.

- **Students in risk groups**

If a student is in a risk group, the school should facilitate remote support, as it does in all cases of long-term illness.

- **Others**

If a teacher is absent, his replacement must be ensured. Students should always be guaranteed to remain in the classroom, and the teacher should ensure work that can be done autonomously in these circumstances.

### 3 - Codes of conduct

In this partial return to classroom attendance efforts to contain the spread of the new coronavirus should be maintained.

The Contingency Plan implemented in each grouping of schools or schools not grouped should safeguard good hand hygiene practices and respiratory etiquette and also promote physical distance. In this sense, daily prevention measures are reinforced and should be implemented by the entire educational community, inside and outside the school premises:
• The use of masks inside the school (inside and outside the classroom, except in situations where the specificity of the function does not allow it) and on the home-school-home route (especially when public transportation is used);

• Avoid touching the front of the mask;

• When entering school, disinfect hands with an alcohol-based antiseptic solution (SABA);

• Wash hands frequently, with soap and water, rubbing them well for at least 20 seconds;

• Reinforce hand washing before and after meals, before and after school, before and after using the toilet and whenever they are dirty;

• Use tissues (single use) to blow, throw them in a dustbin after use and wash your hands with water and soap afterwards;

• Cough or sneeze into the inner area of the arm, with the elbow flexed, and never into the hands;

• Avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth;

• Keeping your physical distance, in and out of school space;

• Avoid touching common goods and surfaces such as handrails, door handles, switches, etc;

• Disseminate / promote, in educational spaces, campaigns to raise awareness of good hygiene practices, use, placing and removal of masks, as well as physical distance and respiratory tag.

• Final notes: The implementation of plans for the progressive lifting of containment measures is subject to change as a result of the assessment of the impacts of the measures on the evolution of the pandemic.

4 - General measures for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces

• Educational establishments should ensure that cleaning professionals are aware of the rules for the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (according to Annex I) and for the correct washing of hands (according to Annex II).

• It is also important that each educational establishment has a cleaning and disinfecting plan and should ensure:
  ▪ That useful information is posted in a visible place accessible to staff;
Knowledge about the correct use of cleaning products (detergents and disinfectants), according to the Product Safety Data Sheets;

- The availability of appropriate cleaning and disinfection materials (Annex III).

5 - Procedure for cleaning and disinfection

When disinfecting an area, the main concerns are:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):
  - Equipment should be used to protect the professional, both from the products used and from possible contamination existing in the area where he/she will operate, and also to prevent him/her from bringing contaminants from outside to the disinfection area.
  
  About PPE, see Annex I.

The manual shows how to put PPE on...
... and how to remove it

- **Entry to the "soiled area"**:  
  - The professional should enter the areas to be cleaned already fully equipped and wearing the PPE, bringing any cleaning material and also bags ready for the collection of waste;  
  - When entering the "soiled area", he/she should open windows and air the area whenever possible.

- **Operation within the "dirty area"**:  
  - Start cleaning from top to bottom and from the farthest areas from the entrance door to the entrance/exit door;  
  - Take special care when cleaning most touched objects (e.g. switches; door handles; taps; handrails; tables; chairs; computer keyboards; telephones and others) and most frequented areas;
As you are cleaning, deposit disposable materials in appropriate bags (of a different colour than usual, or properly identified), taking care not to contaminate the outside of the bag.

Exiting the "soiled area":

- At the end of the cleaning, wait to have the space totally ventilated and only then close the windows;
- Clean the bottles and cleaning products before leaving;
- Clean gloves and shoes on the outside without removing them;
- Put the dirty bag inside another clean one and close the bag;
- Leave the area and close the door whenever possible;
- Once the cleaning is finished, place the reusable PPE in hermetically sealed packaging to transport them to the disinfection/washing area of the material and the disposable PPE in the waste bags.

Waste:

- The waste bags must be placed in the container ("waste bin") for undifferentiated waste. Under no circumstances should this waste be placed in the selective collection container or deposited at the recycling point.
- Never leave the waste bags in public spaces, or areas where they can be moved.

6 - Cleaning frequency

- The disinfection of spaces and surfaces must be carried out at least on a daily basis and whenever necessary according to the technique described below.

- The frequency standards are:
  
  **Bathrooms** - at least twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon;
  **Areas and objects in common use** - handrails, door handles, switches, frequent contact areas - at least twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon;
  **Classrooms** - at the end of each use, whenever there is a change of class;
  **Teachers' rooms** - in the morning and afternoon;
  **Cafeterias** - right after one group has been used and before another enters the area, especially the tables and self-service areas.

7 - Products and techniques for disinfecting school spaces
• Cleaning and disinfecting indoor school spaces uses the following products and techniques:

  ▪ **Disinfection agents:**
    o Ready-to-use (already diluted) sodium hypochlorite solution with a concentration of 0.05%. If you have to dilute sodium hypochlorite or another product with equal disinfectant power and alcohol to 70% (for surfaces that do not support sodium hypochlorite), follow the instructions in Annex IV.

  ▪ **Method of application.** Water should be used with:
    o Bucket and floor mop;
    o Disposable cleaning cloths or reusable (washable) microfibre cloths, if they can be washed and disinfected by heat, in a washing machine;
    o Whenever possible, leave the surfaces moist until they dry in the air so that the disinfectant can act effectively.

• **Order of cleaning of the enclosed spaces** (classrooms, teachers' rooms, among others):
  o Cleaning should start from top to bottom, from the cleanest to the dirtiest areas, and from the farthest from the entrance door to the entrance/exit door. The floor should be the last to be cleaned.
  o Take special care when cleaning the most touched objects (e.g. switches; door handles; taps; handrails; tables; countertops; chairs; computer keyboards; telephones and others) and the most frequented areas.

• **General procedures:**
  o First wash the surfaces with water and detergent and then spread the sodium hypochlorite solution evenly on the surfaces;
  o Allow the disinfectant to act on the surfaces for at least 10 minutes, whenever possible;
  o Rinse surfaces with water only;
  o Allow to air dry whenever possible.

  **Cleaning materials**
  There should be different cleaning materials (for exclusive use) depending on the risk level of the areas to be cleaned
There are also rules about cleaning materials.

- **Specific procedures**
  
  o **Surfaces and equipment to be given special attention**: door handles; light switches; telephones; lift buttons (if any); taps; flush handles; handrails; computer materials such as keyboards, screens and mice; electronic or other existing equipment that is frequently handled.

  o **Floor (last to be cleaned)**: shall be washed with water and common detergent, followed by disinfection with ready-to-use sodium hypochlorite solution, or solution diluted in cold water at the time of use, in accordance with Annex IV and the manufacturer's instructions.
Sanitary facilities: should preferably be washed with product detergent and disinfectant (2:1) because it is easier and faster to apply and disinfect. The bucket and mop used in bathrooms should not be used in other spaces. Different cloths should be used for the sinks and the areas around them and outside the toilets.

- The cleaning of toilets shall follow the following sequence:

1. Start cleaning from the sinks (first the taps and then the sink) and surfaces around them;
2. Then move on to cleaning the toilets:
   - Inside:
     - Apply the detergent product with a disinfectant base, leaving to act for at least 5 minutes;
     - Scrub well inside with a scrubbing brush;
     - Flush the toilet with the toilet brush still inside so that it is also clean;
     - Flush the toilet again.
   - Outside:
     - Spread the detergent/disinfectant on top of the toilet and on the lid;
     - Rub with the cloth: first the lid and then the outside of the toilet seat (top and sides);
     - Wipe the cloth with water only;
     - Leave to air dry;
     - Clean and disinfect the toilet button well at the end.
     - At the end of the cleaning, you should again pass a cloth moistened in disinfectant on all taps.
3. The floor must be washed as described above.

- Refectories:
  - Respect existing cafeteria cleaning plans, using cleaning and disinfection agents approved by current legislation for the food sector.
  - Professionals in the area of food preparation and confectioning should:
    - Always wear a mask during the food preparation, confection and distribution phases;
    - Wash their hands with soap and water immediately before and after handling raw food or before and after using the toilet;
- Clean hands frequently with soap and water or with an antiseptic solution of alcohol base (SABA);
- Comply with the respiratory label.

Informal translation by Safe Communities Portugal