

COVID-19

Virtual Press conference 15 September 2020

Speaker key:

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| MR | Dr Michael Ryan |
| TG | Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus |
| MK | Dr Maria Van Kerkhove |
| FC | Fadela Chaib |
| AA | Audrey Azoulay |
| HF | Henrietta Fore |
| LS | Laurent Sierro |
| SA | Simon Ateba |
| GVH | Gunilla von Hall |
| SG | Stefania Giannini |
| NL | Nicolas Luco |
| GS | Gabriela Sotomayor |

00:00:03

FC I welcome you to our press conference on COVID-19 today, Tuesday 15 September. I am Fadela Chaib, WHO Communications Officer, and I am happy to be moderating this press conference. The focus today will be on COVID-19 and children.

We have with us as always in the room the WHO Director General, Dr Tedros, along with Dr Mike Ryan, Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, and Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, our technical lead on COVID-19, and we have also two special guests today.

This week the three agencies, UNICEF, WHO and UNESCO have issued updated advice to policymakers on how and when to safely reopen schools with full consideration for the wellbeing, health and safety of children.

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As usual, we are translating this press conference in six UN languages. We will be posting the Director General remarks and audio file of the press conference on the web as soon as this press conference is over. A full transcript will be posted on our website tomorrow. But now, and without further delay, I will hand over to Dr Tedros to give his opening remarks. Dr Tedros, you have the floor.

TG Thank you. Thank you, Fadela. Good morning, good afternoon and good evening. I would like to start by welcoming UNESCO Director General, Audrey Azoulay, and UNICEF Executive Director, Henrietta Fore. Welcome to both of you and thank you both for your partnership and leadership.

Since the beginning of the pandemic understanding how COVID-19 affects children has been a priority issue. Nine months into the pandemic, many questions remain but we are starting to have a clearer picture. We know that children and adolescents can be infected and can infect others. We know that this virus can kill children but that children tend to have a milder infection and there are very few severe cases and deaths from COVID-19 among children and adolescents.

The data we have shows that less than 10% of reported cases and less than 0.2% of deaths are in people under the age of 20. However, more research is needed about the factors that increase the risk of severe COVID diseases and death among children and adolescents. And the potential long-term health effects in those who have been infected remains unknown.

Although children have largely been spared many of the most severe health effects of the virus, they have suffered in other ways. In many countries essential services for nutrition and immunisation have been disrupted and millions of children have missed out on months of schooling.

We all want to see children back at school and we all want to make sure schools are the safe and supportive learning environments they should be. The schools are part of a community. In fact, schools connect communities.

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The measures taken in a community to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission will reduce the risk in schools as well. In some countries schools have reopened. In others they remain closed.

To support countries in every situation UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO yesterday published updated guidance on school related public health measures in the context of COVID-19. The guidance provided practical advice for schools in areas with no cases, sporadic cases, clusters of cases, or community transmission.

Given the devastating consequences on children, youth and our societies as a whole, the decision to close schools should be a last resort, temporary and only at a local level in areas with intense transmission. During school closures, continuity of education should be guaranteed through distance learning. The time during which schools are closed should be used to put in place measures to prevent and respond to transmission when schools reopen.

Keeping children safe and at school is not a job for schools alone or governments alone, or families alone. It's a job for all of us, working together.

As we often say, there is no zero risk but with the right combination of measures we can keep our kids safe and teach them that health and education are two of the most precious commodities in life.

I would now like to invite UNESCO Director General, Audrey Azoulay, to say a few words. Director General Azoulay, welcome and you have the floor.

00:05:51

AA I would like to thank my dear colleagues and friends, Dr Tedros from WHO and Henrietta Fore from UNICEF, as once again our agencies have worked together to provide support, advice, hear the updated advice in this time of fragility and uncertainty.

As the new academic year begins in many parts of the world, the latest data that UNESCO has just produced tells us that today the health of the global student population is not yet back in schools. The longer schools remain closed, the more damaging the consequences, especially for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds who, in addition to learning, rely on school for health, for safety and sometimes for nutrition.

Therefore supporting the safe reopening of schools must be a priority for us all, in particular supporting the return of the most disadvantaged. And while this return to school is crucial, it must be done in a safe manner and it's why it's of the utmost importance that education and health work closely together to ensure that schools reopen safely as a matter of priority.

This is the purpose of these updated guidelines that we've just published to bring together the latest scientific evidence for policymakers and school officials responsible for the sometimes difficult decision to take in terms of reopening schools safely. And it will also require new and adjusted habits when the school reopens, and I would like to insist on two points.

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First, as we state in the guidelines, adequate information and communication would need to be provided to and between teachers, school administrators and families in order for health measures to be properly implemented. And in addition, new protocols and rules will also call for rethinking the role and training of teachers, managing differently school times, revising learning content with increased attention to health issues, and fourth, using remedial measures for learning losses.

We need to provide support for the educational community and most particularly teachers to be trained and to adapt learning in this new situation. And we also know that when we deal with education, the decisions that we make today will impact tomorrow's world, and it's also why this specific crisis is also a moment to rethink the future of education, a worldwide reflection that we have launched and that will materialise in the final report in 2021.

But as of today, the education crisis requires also renewed commitment, mobilisation and funding around education in times of COVID-19. And in October 22 we will convene a high level global education meeting for that purpose, to secure financing from governments to invest in schools, to invest in their safe reopening and to prioritise education in the recovery plans.

Last but not least, we must pay very special attention as to leave no one behind. Once the schools reopen today, in some countries we also see that some children are missing. This is why we are launching a back to school campaign especially targeting girls with the lessons from the past where we know that we have already today a risk that 11 million girls may never return to school. I thank you for your attention.

00:10:01

TG Thank you. Thank you so much, Audrey, for that very, very clear message and very glad that we have joined forces to back this campaign.

The next will be Executive Director, Henrietta Fore, the Executive Director of UNICEF, our colleague. Please, you have the floor, Henrietta.

HF Thank you very much, Dr Tedros, and it is wonderful to see both of you. Director General Azoulay, it is terrific to hear your thoughts and comments, and yours also, Tedros, from this morning.

So at the height of COVID-19, schools closed their doors in 192 countries sending 1.6 billion students home. Today, almost nine months since the coronavirus outbreak started, 872 million students, or half the world's student population, in 51 countries are still unable to head back to their classrooms.

Millions of these children were fortunate enough to learn remotely online through radio, through television broadcasts or through the internet. However, UNICEF data shows that for at least 463 million children, whose schools closed during COVID-19, there was no such thing as remote learning.

So why? Because at least one-third of the world's schoolchildren were unable to access remote learning when COVID-19 shuttered their schools, including because of lack of internet access, computers or mobile devices.

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The sheer number of children whose education was completely disrupted for months on end is nothing short of a global education emergency. Let me share one more alarming and new statistic.

UNICEF recently surveyed 158 countries about their school reopening plans and found that one in four countries has not put a date in place for allowing schoolchildren back to the classroom. We know that closing schools for prolonged periods of time can lead to devastating consequences for children. They become more exposed to physical and emotional violence. Their mental health is affected. They are more vulnerable to child labour, sexual abuse and are less likely to break out of the cycle of poverty.

For the most marginalised missing out on school, even if only for a few weeks, can lead to negative outcomes that can last a lifetime. We know that beyond learning schools provide children with vital health, immunisation and nutrition services as well as safe and supportive environments. These services are put on hold when schools are closed.

And we also know that the longer children remain out of school, the less likely they are to return. At least 24 million children are projected to drop out of school due to COVID-19. That's why we are urging governments to prioritise

reopening schools when restrictions are lifted and, as Audrey has mentioned, to reinvest in schools.

We're urging them to look at all the things that children need, learning, protection, physical health, mental health, and ensure the best interests of a child is placed first.

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The latest guidance released by our three agencies offer suggestions on how we can reopen schools while keeping children and communities safe, and we know that some countries have already taken measures to do so.

In Senegal for example schools have spaced out classroom chairs to keep distance between the students. In Rwanda they're building new classrooms and recruiting more teachers. Egypt has created smaller classes and staggered school hours into shifts. Many countries have increased hand-washing stations, introducing health checks and moved sports and other activities outdoors.

Other countries are also using blended learning, a mixture of in-person and remote learning. And when governments decide to keep schools closed, we urge them to scale up remote learning opportunities for all children, especially the most marginalised, and find innovative ways, including online, TV and radio to keep children learning no matter what.

Before the pandemic the world was facing a learning crisis in terms of both access to and quality of education for every child. If we don't take action now together, the crisis will only deepen and children will pay the highest price of all. So thank you, Tedros and Audrey.

00:15:22

TG Thank you, Henrietta. Thank you so much for that very, very clear message to the world, prioritise reopening the schools and invest in schools, and keeping children and communities safe. Now back to you, Fadela. Thank you.

FC Thank you, Dr Tedros. Thank you, Executive Director Fore and Director General Azoulay. We are going to open now the floor to questions from our friends, the media, just reminding them please to raise their hands. Use the raise your hand icon in order to get in the queue to ask a question, and please journalists, tell us who your question is addressed to.

We have several journalists online. One of them is our Swiss journalist, Laurent Sierro from ATS, Swiss News Agency. Laurent, can you hear me?

LS Yes, can you hear me?

FC Yes, very well. Go ahead, Laurent.

LS Very good. Thank you, Fadela, for taking my question. Dr Tedros, yesterday you seemed to endorse the GPMB report and one of the main recommendations was to you and to the SG to convene a high level global summit on health safety. So are you planning to discuss that with the SG and try to convene such a meeting quite fast? Thank you.

FC Dr Tedros?

TG Thank you so much. Yes, we agree with that and we hope that we can do it even in 2021. We need to bring the whole world together in order to really build back better as we always say and the UN General Assembly is very, very critical. So we hope to have a focused meeting on pandemic preparedness and response in 2021. Thank you.

00:17:33

MR Fadela, if I could just add, Dr Tedros, actually in the last quarter or last year, was so concerned with the situation on preparedness in the world that he had engaged with the Secretary General's office and there were a series of meetings to discuss this.

WHO provided a deep risk analysis on the risk of pandemics and the risk of high impact epidemics, and in fact there were meeting between the Secretary General and the Director General and they had agreed that we needed to have a global summit on emerging diseases and epidemic and pandemic preparedness this year. And it had been agree in principle to do that.

That was being used hopefully as an endpoint from what was originally planned in Marrakesh which was a meeting of Ministers of Health and Ministers of Finance from all over the world, again which was planned over a year ago, again to discuss not only the health preparedness for pandemics but financial preparedness and investment preparedness for pandemics.

Unfortunately the Marrakesh meeting had to be obviously postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. So Dr Tedros has been, since certainly he took office and certainly since I've been working on this, has been deeply concerned about this issue and has been advocating at all levels, and in fact as I said, has engaged directly with the Secretary General. And both had planned such an event this year in any case but obviously it's all the more needed now in the aftermath of the pandemic.

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FC Thank you, Mike. The next question is from Simon Ateba, Today News Africa. Simon, can you hear me?

SA Yes, I can hear you. Thank you for taking my question. This is Simon Ateba from Today News Africa in Washington DC. In the first few months we've had many scary headlines in the media about children and COVID-19.

For instance, the African Union recently warned that one in two children have no birth certificate in Africa and COVID-19 was making things worse, while UNICEF, WHO, UN and World Bank also warned that COVID-19 could reverse decades of progress toward eliminating preventable child deaths, and most recently WHO and UNICEF called for a safe school reopening in Africa amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was wondering if WHO, UNICEF and UNESCO can talk a bit more about the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa and about some of these studies being done on how the pandemic is affecting children in Africa. And also, do we know the 1918 flu pandemic affected children at that time and for how long? Thank you.

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FC Thank you, Simon. I would like to invite Executive Director Fore to comment on the situation of children in Sub-Saharan Africa. Over to you.

HF Thank you very much, Simon, for asking. It's also very important, the data that you are bringing up. It is exceptionally important that children born in Africa have birth certificates. Everyone needs an identity and a nationality and it is a right for a child. So making sure that we start off a life well is important.

What we are now thinking about is how to get early childhood development to every child in Sub-Saharan Africa and this is an issue that governments are starting to pick up. I think it's an important one to write about. We would be happy to follow up with you after this meeting to talk about early childhood development.

But then just attending school and going to school, many of the schools in Africa, as you know, do not have running water and a bar of soap and it is going to be increasingly important that we try to raise funds and raise the world's awareness that we need to be able to give to these schools the hygiene practices that we are expecting during a time of COVID.

It is something that we can help governments and civil society and the schools themselves to be able to create. It is very important also that parents know about these.

So, in Sub-Saharan Africa I would say that the initiatives that are underway are in communication, they are in water and sanitation, they are trying to make sure that every child has a chance to continue learning, thus remote learning, whether it's by radio, television or internet connectivity, that there be a way that children can continue to come to school, that they can afford it, so social protection programmes.

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We are deeply worried that the poorest children, particularly the girls, as Audrey mentioned, in the poorest countries will not have a chance to come back to school.

But if I might ask the moderator, if we can follow up with Simon, we have lots of information and would love to talk about this subject. Thank you.

FC Thank you, Executive Director Fore. Any other interventions in the room? Yes, Mike?

MR There was a specific question on age specific mortality during the 1918 pandemic. Just to say that there is a perception about the 1918 pandemic affected mainly healthy young adults. Certainly that was the most unusual feature about the 1918 pandemic.

But it was almost like a W curve. Normally pandemic influenza, seasonal influenza tends to affect very young and very old, and very often healthy adults are relatively unaffected. That was the case even in the most recent pandemic of H1N1.

In the 1918 pandemic you had a very high impact in under-fives, a very high impact in people over 60, but unusually a huge impact on young otherwise healthy people, and that was the unusual and shocking factor associated with

that pandemic and something we need to be cognisant of today as we see coronavirus passing through younger generations.

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It's certainly not necessarily killing or causing the deaths of many otherwise young and healthy adults, but as I said before in previous pressers, we are seeing the emergence of long-term impacts and long-term health effects in that population and that will have to be carefully observed.

In that sense in the 1918 pandemic, the young and healthy were greatly affected, immediately through the process of mortality. It remains to be seen what the long-term impacts of this COVID-19 are in that age group. We hope they are not too severe.

FC Maria, something to add?

MK Yes, just very briefly is to say that while we are really trying to understand this particular virus and its impact on children all over the world, and luckily what we do see so far is that the majority have a mild infection or asymptomatic infection but that's not universal.

We do see children infected with this virus who have had severe disease and tragically we have seen children die from this disease. But as Mike has said, we don't know the long-term effects. And I think we also need to recognise that there's the direct impact of COVID-19 and there's the indirect impact of all of the other services that have been pushed aside because of this virus.

People are working so hard, governments are working so hard to ensure that vaccines are provided, the routine vaccinations for children and for adults as well, but making sure that individuals have access to medical care, the medical care that they need, life-saving essential medical services and other medical services that are required for children.

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So there will be an impact on children as well beyond the direct infection with this particular virus. So this is something all of us are deeply concerned about so that we ensure that while we are trying to control COVID we still ensure medical services are provided, vaccines are provided, so that we can keep children and all people safe.

FC Thank you, Maria. The next question is from Gunilla von Hall. Gunilla, can you hear me? Gunilla, can you un-mute yourself please?

GVH Can you hear me?

FC Yes, very well, Gunilla. Go ahead please.

GVH Thank you for taking my question. In Europe right now we see an increase in cases, Spain, France, UK, and one explanation has been that people are coming back from vacations and young people are going out more, but also that schools are reopening. So to what extent do schools drive community transmission? Thanks.

FC Thank you, Gunilla. Maria?

MK Yes, I will start and I'm sure others would like to supplement. The first part of your question is asking about the increase in case numbers across countries in Europe.

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I think there are a number of reasons why we are seeing this. First of all, surveillance has improved, testing capacity has drastically improved, and so this is a positive. The public health infrastructure that we've been talking about of getting in place and having the ability to identify cases, isolate cases, carry out contact tracing, making sure that testing is ramped up and that test results get back quickly so that public health actions can be done, we're seeing that working in many, many countries.

As societies have been opening up over the summer months in the northern hemisphere, we have started to see some resurgence in some countries. Some of this resurgence is reaching levels that were higher than we saw in April and in May and that is worrying. There's a worrying trend that we are definitely seeing in some countries.

And some of this has to do with the way societies are opening up and people are gathering again. If the virus is present and if there are gatherings that are taking place, particularly if gatherings are taking place in crowded settings, in indoor locations with poor ventilation, the virus will spread. So we have seen some clustering.

Your specific question about schools itself, we're really learning right now about the role that schools are playing. So you've heard us say this many times before, schools do not operate in isolation. Schools are part of communities. So if the virus is present and transmitting in communities, it's possible that the virus will be able to transmit in that school.

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There are a number of countries across Europe that opened their schools in the springtime and they did this in a slow and a staggered way. They started out by looking at the youngest children for example. Denmark is a good example of this, looking at what are the types of classrooms, what are the age groups that we could start opening up with, how do we do this where we can keep physical distancing within the classrooms, how we can ensure that there are control measures in school, that there's a plan in place.

And this is all outlined in the guidance that UNICEF and UNESCO and WHO released yesterday, really outlining all of these measures that are in place because there are ways to safely open up schools, but the key is really to make sure that transmission is under control in the community.

We do know that children can be infected. We do know that children can transmit the virus but there appear to be differences in age group to the extent at which they transmit, with the youngest children infected less and transmitting less than adolescents for example. But we're learning.

This is an area of active research and active study because so many are concerned about this. So we do not have a full picture yet but there are ways that we can open up schools and we have seen a number of countries that have done this slowly, controlling transmission in the communities, putting

measures in place within the school systems themselves, educating, talking to the parents, talking to the children themselves, listening to the parents, listening to the children themselves, and have found ways to do this safely. But it needs to be done in a slow and a staggered way.

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FC Thank you, Maria. Any other intervention, from our guests maybe?

SG May I take the floor? I'm from UNESCO. Thank you very much and good afternoon, good morning to my dear friends in Geneva and across the sea.

If I may, in addition to what Maria said, I think that focusing on the added value of these guidelines, which is about really providing a simple list of recommendations which are related to prevention and countermeasures, for instance physical distancing inside the classroom, outside the classroom, use of masks in school settings, and this is about what different ages must be suggested and somehow educated to do.

For instance, age five children don't have to wear a mask but between six and 11 it's about a risk-based approach. It's about evaluation and countermeasure oriented approach, and this is a very important dimension, and so and so, ventilation, hygiene of course and daily practices.

So just to say that the schools, when they will implement, and this is something that governments are very keen to do, this list of recommendations and these measures really become more safe places in terms of the public spaces and public institutions.

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So I think that all the list of recommendations you find in these guidelines can really provide a sense that reopening is a priority, as Henrietta and Audrey said before. Reopening schools is about giving the right education to every single child in the world on the other side, first health.

And it's possible to combine these two important fundamental rights and dimensions. And this is very much about the great cooperation we are running with our partners through the Global Education Coalition that UNESCO established some months ago and all the work you are doing on the ground and in terms of a global collection of data and recommendations, as in this case. Thank you very much.

FC Thank you, Madam. Can I just ask you to introduce yourself for our journalist friends?

SG Stefania Giannini. I'm the Assistant Director General for Education at UNESCO.

FC Thank you.

HF I would also add to that question if you have time.

FC Executive Director Fore, you have the floor.

HF Thank you. Some of the measures about schools being safe are simply practical. As Tedros has mentioned, it is part of a community, so simple

things like if you are unwell, stay home. And that's for a student, it's for a teacher, it's for a staff member. And contact the school.

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And then there are a number of suggestions that are there about cohorting and keeping in bubbles and capsules. What a variety of schools are trying out, that seems to be working, is staggering the times of when school sessions begin and when there are breaks and when one is out in the playgrounds.

The direction of walking, frequently cleaning the surfaces, good ventilation, all of these are important in schools and they're also important in homes. So if we begin to get good habits at home, to Stefania's point, schools can become an area that is very safe, so schools and homes and communities can become safe all at the same time. Thank you.

FC Thank you. Dr Ryan?

MR In terms of the question before about Europe and now about children, Europe is facing that moment as Europe enters into a season in which people will begin to come back indoors and in which the infection will grow, no question. People will come back closer together.

And Europe has to be able to maintain, like other countries and other regions, some very important principles. I think we've all established globally that we wish collectively to protect older and vulnerable individuals with a high risk of death if they contract this disease. I think we've all seen the devastating impact of this disease in those vulnerable groups.

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I think the second thing we've all come to a consensus around is that our schools are important and the education of our children is something that we hold above all else. How do we hold those two principles, protecting the vulnerable from death and getting our children back to school?

Something in some sense has to give because we have to sustain pressure on this virus. We have to reduce transmission at community level in order to lower the risk to those older and vulnerable people and to maintain an environment in which our children can continue to attend school.

The only way to do that is that the adults separate themselves enough to drive transmission downwards. So what is more important, our children back at school or the nightclubs and the bars open? I think these are decisions that we have to make in coming into the winter months. These are tradeoffs. There are no easy answers. It will be very easy to sit here with Dr Tedros saying you can do this and this and this and this. Unfortunately sometimes when you do this, you can't do the other thing. You have to make those decisions.

So I do think there's a time for decision making coming as the season grows into the winter months for many, many countries. And there are no correct answers. I think the risk management approach is the only way to go. If we're going to keep our kids at school and if we're going to protect those older and vulnerable people, and we don't as yet have a vaccine, then sustained surveillance, test and trace, quick results, cluster investigation, isolation of

cases, quarantining of contacts... I'm sorry to be boring and I'm sorry to keep saying this over and over and over again but there are no alternatives.

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This is what we must do. And the DG has said it again and again and again. I know it's not easy and it's hard to sustain and everyone is exhausted but if we are to serve our children and those older and vulnerable people in our population who might die this winter in these countries, then we must sustain these other activities. And these cannot be sustained without government commitment to do this and society's commitment to participate and be part of this.

I do think that conversation needs to be had in many countries right now and it's something that needs to be... There are no magic bullets, I've said it before, and we need to stop looking for unicorns.

FC Thank you, Dr Ryan. Now I'm inviting Nicolas Luco from Santiago, Chile, to ask his question. Nicolas, can you hear me?

NL I can hear you.

FC Thank you. Go ahead.

NL I would like to ask Executive Director of UNICEF the following question. COVID has disrupted much but what disruptions would you mention as positive, for example, the greater involvement of fathers in the bringing up of children or new ways of learning, or new ways of leveraging health in school systems? Thank you.

FC Thank you for this very interesting question. Executive Director Fore?

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HF This is a wonderful observation. There are more fathers involved now in parenting and in being a teacher than we have had in many, many decades, and it is because they are home and they are seeing what their children are learning and what happens in the home when they often have been away or outside of the home at work.

We often tell our own people that they need to be a parent first, a teacher second and then a colleague at UNICEF third. And I think this is starting to be something that almost every one of us in our own private lives have now realised, that the importance of looking after our children and teaching them many things, while they are in school and when they are out of school, is our responsibility and it's our legacy to the next generation.

We are also finding that parenting hubs, these chat rooms and telephone banks where parents can ask information of websites and others are extremely helpful and many fathers are coming to visit, but also fathers and mothers together because they are interested or they're concerned about a particular issue.

It's particularly challenging for parents who have children who are otherwise able, and so if there is some sort of a learning disability it is difficult often for parents to know what to do. So parenting hubs and information has really

become primary and we are seeing lots and lots of parents that are coming for information, and that is enormously good. It's powerful.

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So how will we come out of this time of COVID stronger? We believe that we can have a leapfrog of technologies and of the ability to have remote learning. We've recently launched with some private sector partners, Microsoft and the University of Cambridge, something called The Learning Passport which allows a country to put its national education system online and for young people to download it in their own home language.

It was originally developed for refugees who were on the move and unable to reach their national curriculum. But now we are seeing that there is a great use for this in countries all over the world. So Timor-Leste said they would sign up right away and try to get learning to their students so that they would not miss any schooling. But it is a time for all of us to relook at the investments that we are placing in education.

If we can connect every school and every learner to the internet in the next five or six years, we will have moved our world a leap forward. So we have an initiative that is all UN agencies, it is a big public/private partnership in which we are talking about how to connect every school and learner to the internet.

Many children now are interested in learning things but they do not necessarily want to learn what they had been learning in the classroom and now that the classroom isn't there, they want to learn things that they think will be relevant. So self-initiated learning is also good. It's part of learning for a lifetime.

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So online remote learning, this is our once in a generation opportunity to really get this in place for the entire world. It's developed countries as well as developing countries. We've all found that there is not enough connectivity and we are not ready in our school curriculums for online learning.

So we work with UNESCO often on this around the world and with WHO on many of these issues. Thank you very much.

FC Thank you, Executive Director Fore for these inspiring words. I will now give the floor to Gabriela Sotomayor from Proceso, a Mexican journalist. Gabriela, can you hear me?

GS Yes.

FC Ask your question please.

GS Yes, thank you. My question, I will make it in Spanish. Maybe Mike Ryan already answered part of the question but I will ask it anyway. [Spanish].

FC Thank you, Gabriela. Dr Ryan will start. Mike?

MR I don't think there's a single person on this planet that doesn't want our kids back in school. The difficulty is putting our kids back in school in a safe environment that is safe for them, for their teachers, for the community, and there are so many unknowns with this virus that it's understandable that everyone is taking very cautious steps, very tentative steps to do this.

We take one step forward, we learn some more and then we move forward some more. And then sometimes we move forward and we have to step back because we learn something and we need to do it in a different way.

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And I think if we accept that process that we're all in this together and everyone wants that to happen, then we can look at the individual context in individual countries and at a sub-national level.

I think Henrietta has laid it out. Different countries are at different stages of being able to deliver their education products, remotely versus non-remotely, and when you have a very strong remote learning platform you can choose to use that more quickly and take your kids out of physical school.

But where you have a situation where that's not developed, then keeping kids at school becomes a priority and you may have to leave your children in school even though you do have more community transmission. And these are tradeoffs and they have to be managed according to the risks and how society sees and values that process within the national context.

So it's very hard for WHO or UNICEF or UNESCO to pre-specify how countries make those decisions. I do think that the evidence that is emerging is that children, while obviously they can be infected, they tend to process the infection quickly, they tend to clear the infection quickly and they do not appear to be a major, major part of the transmission dynamics of this pandemic. But that remains to be fully discovered.

What we do know is that children are damaged educationally by not being in school, and there we're trading those two things off against each other.

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The other question is how safe can the school environment be made? There are different resources around the world and there are different levels of space. If you live in an urban slum you may have a very tiny classroom with 50 children in it. That's very different to having 20 kids in a gymnasium in a school that has access to more and more space and that can expand.

So again it comes down to the ability of the system to adapt to the risk, and some systems can adapt because they have the resources and the space and they have the planning, and some it's not the case. So I think it's very hard to pre-specify.

But I would like to comment and one thing I think we should say is that teachers and administrators around the world have really worked themselves so hard to bring kids back to school, and that is from the village level to the national level.

There have been huge efforts made by teachers, by teacher/parent groups, by committees and others who govern schools to get our kids back to school. We spoke about the heroes in the first five or six months of this epidemic and they still remain heroes, our frontline health workers. Our teachers and our school administrators and our school committees are heroes too because they're doing everything they can to get our children back to school. And governments

need to support them in that and we, as a community, need to support them in that.

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And we, the best thing we can do to support our children back in school is reduce our risk of being exposed and reduce our chance of exposing others. If we do that, our children can stay in school.

Again, I'm saying it again because I think it comes down to that. What are we prepared to do in the adult community to ensure that we neither expose ourselves nor expose others to this virus? If we do that I think we can keep our kids in school.

MK Very briefly just to say I think what we're seeing right now is a calibration period. We're really figuring this out of how we can do this. How can we look at controlling transmission within the community and it does start there. It's the foundation of opening up.

And then how do we start to open up? Where do we look to open up first? Do we look at businesses? Do we look at other types of workers, factory workers, and at a certain percentage opening up slowly our restaurants, our entertainment industries, our schools? It's this balance of how to bring each of these open.

Countries are showing us how to do this. The decisions and the agony, quite frankly, that decision-makers have on when they can open up and how they can open up, and I know all over the world people who run the schools, the administrators, are agonising over how to do this safely because everyone recognises the importance of school, not only for education but for the social wellbeing of children, for their mental health, for safety, for security, and in many parts of the world, where children receive their meal for the day.

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So it's incredibly important. And remote learning has definitely been a positive but that doesn't exist all over the world. Any parent who has had to try to carry on their work at home and try to teach a child, or two or three who are home with them, knows how difficult it is. We all have collectively an incredible increased respect for teachers and what they do every single day.

Within the guidance that we have outlined, what we are trying to do, which has been highlighted by many today and previously, with our partners from UNESCO and with UNICEF is really try to give an overview of the comprehensive multilayered measures that are needed to prevent the introduction of the virus into a school and if the virus does enter the school, how to prevent it from spreading.

This includes what to do in communities, at the school itself, within the classroom itself and at individual levels. And all of this starts at home. It starts at what can we do at home to prevent ourselves from getting infected, to protect our families? And what is positive with children is that you can make this fun in teaching them and being a good role model at home and showing them how to wash your hands and sing the songs and practice your respiratory etiquette, wear a mask, practice your physical distancing, talk about it.

This is very, very difficult stuff and it's complicated and the measures may change and the instructions may change. So this is complicated and this is frustrating but talk to your children, talk to each other and support each other.

00:51:11

And I think that we are finding ways to get through this, but just to say this calibration balance that we are finding, putting our children first and making sure that they can go back to school safely, everybody agrees is incredibly important.

FC Thank you, Maria. I believe UNESCO and UNICEF guests would like to say a few words. Let's start with Stefania Giannini from UNESCO.

SG Thank you very much for giving me the floor. Just to say that from the very beginning of this unprecedented crisis and the huge impact on education, continuity of learning has been somehow our red line, our claim and all what we are doing and we did together over the last six months was about really assuring as much as possible continuity of learning for children.

This is very much about implementing the right to education that the journalist who put the question mentioned before. Of course as an international organisation we must be very honest, we don't have binding measures. We cannot impose decisions. It's not our job.

But it's about first providing quick solutions, secondly organising a strong and very innovative kind of partnership. I mentioned the Global Coalition that UNESCO established some months ago and this is about putting teachers as one of the flagships of the common action. And teacher means supporting them in their lack of training in the digital classrooms.

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Our recent survey says that 65% of teachers globally, we asked them, are you prepared to jump from the traditional classroom to the virtual ones, and they said no. And then that's the need to support governments to train teachers and to make the system resilient and ready to go, we don't know, in a second wave or whatever, in a crisis which imposes politicians to shut down the school systems.

But now the issue is another one. The issue is how we can provide political leaders the right tools to make the right choices and to make decisions in terms of reopening schools in a safe manner and to give the right education in the new environment.

I already mentioned some of the very concrete recommendations. Henrietta talked about the physical distancing and hygiene measures and washing hands. I want to say there is a very concrete recommendation about educating the young, the very little children to wear the mask correctly. For us it's clear it's like this but if you put it like this, it doesn't work, just to give you a very concrete example of what you are doing.

And then there is the next phase. Let me say very briefly that in my opinion this COVID-19 in education, as well as in many other public sectors, has been a big game changer. It reduced the distance, as already said before, between family space, family time, teaching and learning spaces and time. It's about

giving the children and teachers also the opportunity to find very innovative solutions and governments to implement a different kind of approach with radio and televisions which we saw many countries in many regions of the world, certain regions in Africa first.

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So, to conclude, I think that it's also a great opportunity to re-imagine education, the model of learning and teaching, and this is something that UNESCO started to think about with our partners last year and now the future of education has become a great priority for all of us, and a new way to give the right education to our youth and children.

FC Thank you. Now I would like to give the floor to Executive Director Fore.

HF Thank you. You can see how passionate we all are about this. So Gabriela asked about governments and Mike Ryan started with the heroes that we have among us, the teachers and the health workers, and Maria picked that up and Stefania just mentioned it.

Governments can be heroes if they invest in schools. This is the time when they should do it, so rearranging budgets so that there is some room for education will mean that it's an investment for the future. It's the best investment you can make to invest in a child and a young person.

So invest in the teachers, invest in a modern curriculum, invest in the physical distancing and the ability to wash your hands and have a bar of soap, as we talked about for Africa. And invest in connectivity. If governments reallocate their budgets around connecting every school to the internet and training the teachers and training everyone, they will have a new baseline, a new even field.

00:57:04

That means that their children and their country can grow in the years ahead. So governments can be heroes too. Thank you.

FC Thank you Dr Tedros, Executive Director Fore, Director General Azoulay and Stefania for your valuable contribution. I now will conclude this press conference and remind you that we will provide you with the audio file and Dr Tedros' remarks immediately after this press conference.

We will also have the full transcript posted tomorrow on our website. I apologise to those who could not get their questions answered. Please contact me, contact the WHO news team and we will make sure you get your answers from us or our sister agencies. Thank you so much. Au revoir.

Dr Tedros, if you want to say a few words before we conclude.

TG I think you said au revoir so thank you so much to Henrietta and Stefania for joining us. This is a very important joint venture and long live our partnership, UNESCO, UNICEF and WHO, and look forward to really implementing the guidance that we have released today together.

So thank you so much and especially to Henrietta. I would like to recognise the presence of Jerome with us, your excellent colleague here. He has been

embedded with us for more than six months and impressed by his commitment. But what do I expect from UNICEF? Of course I'm not surprised.

So thank you so much. This is the kind of partnership we need to really uphold. And it's only together that we can defeat this pandemic. Again, thank you so much.

HF Very good. Thank you, Tedros. Thank you, Stefania.

SG Thank you. Bye-bye. Thank you very much.

00:59:14