

No link between schools opening and rising COVID-19 cases, data shows

- Study of 191 countries shows school openings have generally not been associated with rises in COVID-19 cases
- Lessons from countries opening schools in second waves vital to address 'pandemic learning debt' for 711 million children still out of school, and those currently in school threatened with further potential closures
- Closures predicted to cost world's children 300 billion disrupted school days in 2020

Zurich, 1 October 2020 – Widespread reopening of schools around the world following the vacation break has generally not been associated with rising COVID-19 infection rates, according to a report published today by [Insights for Education](#), an independent foundation dedicated to analysing education evidence and providing actionable recommendations for education leaders.

As countries have reopened their school systems in August and September after planned academic breaks, the report provides the first comprehensive and independent analysis of school opening decisions and approaches across 191 countries, drawing from data collected over a six-month period.

While opinion remains divided on when it is safe to reopen schools, Insights for Education's analysis shows no correlation between school reopening and a rise in COVID-19 infection rates, but many lessons to learn from those countries reopening against a backdrop of major second waves.

Insights for Education founder and CEO [Dr. Randa Grob-Zakhary](#) said: *"While decisions must reflect local conditions, it's essential to study the evidence to avoid making false assumptions about the impact of opening and closing schools on virus transmission. It's been assumed that opening schools will drive infections, and that closing schools will reduce transmission, but the reality is much more complex. The key now is to learn from those countries that are reopening effectively against a backdrop of rising infections."*

The vast majority (92%) of countries that are through their first wave of infections have now started to reopen school systems, even as some experience significantly higher COVID-19 caseloads. Fifty two countries that sent students back to school in August and September – including France and Spain for example – saw their infection rates rise during the vacation compared to when they were closed. Elsewhere – in the United Kingdom or Hungary for example –, infections levels dropped after initial closure, remained low during the holidays, and began rising again after reopening. The full analysis of these 52 countries concludes no correlation can be established between school status and infection levels, raising the importance of considering multiple additional factors.

While 45 countries worldwide have kept their schools closed, determining how to stay open, rather than how to reopen, is now the focus for most. Countries are evolving diverse strategies, including:

- **Temporary school closure** – In Italy, if a pupil or staff member tests positive, there may be a brief temporary closure to allow for testing. Each decision is taken on a case-by-case basis by local authorities and depends on the spread of the virus, the level of contact, the layout of the school buildings and many other factors. In France, a softening of health protocols has been enacted in pre-school and primary schools to limit school closures. A new threshold of three COVID-positive children within a classroom has been established to define a risk of "contact case". Below this threshold, children don't have to get tested and classes remain open.
- **Testing** – While the prioritisation of testing for teachers and students is not common across systems, there are strong signs that countries are increasingly fast tracking or rapidly mobilising testing for schools with positive cases, in order to reduce the number of days

schools are closed (e.g. Japan, Germany, Luxembourg, some US school districts, Sierra Leone for exam students, Liberia, Lithuania).

- **Other varying safety measures** – Policies include mask use for teachers and students, class rotation and flexible pairing of remote learning with in-school lessons.
- **Transparency** – Establishing trust with parents and teachers, with co-developed guidelines, is fundamental to the successful reopening of schools. Japan even goes so far as to publish data on the number of closure days per school, helping to build the trust and confidence that have characterised its school returns.

“This first real global test highlights what school life looks like in a COVID-world,” said Randa Grob-Zakhary. *“Understanding how countries undergoing a massive second-wave are dealing with this new reality in the classroom is essential to guide future reopening decisions and to help schools remain open. Relentless tracking and sharing of these observations can offer decision-makers insight and confidence to get the most marginalized students back to schools as soon as possible.”*

Based on a [Back to School Tracking Tool](#) developed to support reopening decisions, Insights for Education estimates that nearly half the world’s 1.6 billion primary and secondary students (711 million) will not return to school in 2020, the vast majority (84%) from lower-income countries, resulting in a total of 300 billion disrupted school days this year.

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[Link to Report](#)

About Insights for Education

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