



Ensuring a Covid-19-safe environment for early intervention centres, childcare centres and kindergartens post-lockdown — Ng Lai-Thin, Amar-Singh HSS, Wong Woan-Yiing

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APRIL 10 — The movement control order (MCO) imposed on the nation has been very useful to slow down the spread of Covid-19. We are however just at the beginning of this pandemic. It is expected that Covid-19 cases will rebound episodically and we will have to control each ‘wave’ until it gradually fades over time; this is estimated to be for at least another one year or two. We are in it for the long haul and need to start planning for the way we are going to live and work in the immediate future.

The key will be safe physical distancing, preventing crowds, limiting physical contact, keeping our hands and surfaces clean at all times, using masks when in close proximity with others and taking other sensible precautions.

For those of us working with children, we have **developed a detailed standard operating policy (SOP)** to ensure a Covid-19-safe environment for early intervention centres (EIPs), childcare centres and kindergartens. It is important that all these centres take hygiene and safe physical distancing measures seriously as we work together to minimise the spread of the coronavirus.

While children are thankfully not severely affected by this coronavirus outbreak, they are recognised to have asymptomatic infections and are possibly important for the spread of the virus to their families, teachers and other children.

This Covid-19 safety SOP is written to guide early childhood centres to take precautionary measures to curb the spread of Covid-19 disease in the community when the centres reopen for operation. This guideline is written for the context of early childhood centres such as early intervention centres, childcare centres, kindergartens. However, parts of the guidelines may also apply to other centres that provide services to children and teenagers like schools, colleges, universities, etc.

This guideline was written by the National Early Childhood Intervention Council, Malaysia which comprises 26 non-governmental organisations involved in early childhood intervention.

This is a 'living' document and it is hoped that it will be revised as we understand more about the pandemic. It will also be made available in Malay and Chinese in the near future on our website.

The full SOP is 16 pages long and available for download and use from this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/Covid19-SOP-EC>

The SOP outlines in detail preventive measures required and adjustments to the school and class environment and schedule. For example shorter school hours and learning time to accommodate time for cleaning and staggering use of common areas may be necessary.

The SOP covers in depth the following areas:

1. Training and preparation for the whole school community including staff, parents and children before the centre reopens.
2. Universal (basic) prevention measures to undertake at all times and signage required.
3. Continual health checks and screening required.
4. Specific prevention measures to take for the entire period from transport, arrival, entry to centre, teaching sessions, breaks, meals, toileting and leaving.
5. There are specific instructions for the classroom environment and class-in-session.
6. Staff meetings and training, as well as virtual learning for homebound children are also covered.

We hope this SOP will be useful for many working with children in a variety of settings. The SOP may need to be adapted to suit the unique local situation. However the basic principles of safe physical distancing, preventing crowding, limiting physical contact, keeping our hands and surfaces clean at all times must not be compromised.

We also hope this SOP encourages others to prepare their own SOPs for various work environments. As members of the community, everyone plays an important role to help keep the Covid-19 pandemic in control.

Our blessings to all of us as we move forward to develop new ways of living, working and interacting with each other.

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