inclusive education - psychosocial support, health, hygiene, and safety in COVID19-

Inclusive education in the context of COVID -19
The COVID-19 pandemic led to disruptions in the day-to-day lives of Palestine refugee children, their friends, families and wider communities across the UNRWA Fields of operations. These changes in the wider context resulted in the adaptation of the delivery of teaching and learning to ensure the continuation of students’ access to quality, inclusive and equitable education. An inclusive approach to education entails adopting a more inclusive practices for the benefit of all children, strengthening support for some children who need additional support and developing support systems for a few children with extensive needs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this meant adopting a Self-Learning model to reach children, with greater emphasis on psychosocial well-being and health and safety which are central to children’s ability to learn and develop. The unprecedented nature of the pandemic has meant that the Education Programme worked on raising student awareness on the prevention of the transmission of COVID-19 and actively engaging them in developing and sharing their own messages.

Psychosocial support
The unique nature of the pandemic and the restrictions on movements required rethinking of how psychosocial support (PSS) could be delivered. HQ Education and the Fields swiftly established a group to facilitate learning and knowledge sharing; to collaborate in the review of available materials and determine how these materials could be adapted for this crisis; and in areas where resources/materials were lacking, research and learn from what had been developed by other credible organisations. HQ Education was able to respond in real-time to Field-specific queries.

Communications from the Fields, and the Agency overall, with children, parents and the wider community on the importance of continuing their education was vital.

School counsellors provided awareness sessions, individual and group counselling sessions and recreational activities through different platforms. Care calls were conducted on an ongoing basis to check on children’s well-being with priority given to students who were previously identified as needing additional psychosocial support.

There was also emphasis on the integration of psychosocial support into self-study materials to support children who could not meet with their friends, particularly during the early stages of the pandemic.

Health and hygiene safety
The UNRWA approach to the health and safety of its students and staff during COVID-19 is based on the available knowledge from credible sources such as WHO, World Food Programme, other UN agencies and the World Bank, and aligned with Host government guidance.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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October 2021
An education health protocol ‘COVID-19 Protocol for the safe and healthy re-opening of UNRWA educational institutions’ was developed and the capacity of education staff and students was strengthened to help them better adhere to health protective measures.

Checklists for continuous assessment and monitoring of adherence to the health protective measures were developed and used at schools. Essentially, the key health and hygiene measures to be adhered to through different learning modalities are:

- applying social distancing measures and organising children into ‘bubbles’.
- implementing health and hygiene practices; hand washing/sanitation, respiratory hygiene practices, mask wearing and ventilation.
- limiting sharing of learning resources and sports equipment.
- cleaning and disinfecting of the schools with continuous monitoring.
- conducting awareness-raising activities on the virus, via possible communication routes and distributing posters and leaflets to reinforce the important messages about coronavirus and its prevention.
- introducing new instructions for canteen contractors to comply with health and hygiene standards and conditions related to the prevention of COVID-19.

To help strengthen children’s understanding regarding behaviours and practices, UNRWA Education conducted an on-line Drawing and Writing Event for all its students during July-October 2020. This event helped UNRWA students realise that they have a role in reducing the spread of the disease and provided them with an opportunity to express their creativity whilst being confined at home.

Resources developed by Department of Education related to psychosocial support and health

Different resources were developed and shared with the Fields as a response to the COVID-19 situation and schools’ lockdown. Firstly, the Department of Education developed a “guide to learning, health, safety and psychosocial resources” to support all education staff in the fields to support students as a quick reference guide to the most useful resources produced globally.

Thirdly, the Department developed “activities and games for children’s well-being in times of lockdown and school closure Booklet” to support children’s overall psychosocial well-being and raise awareness of key health behaviour with regards to the prevention of COVID-19. The games and activities have been adapted to accommodate the needs of children with additional needs and impairments (hearing, visual, physical, intellectual). Specific adaptations are outlined, whilst also considering safety precautions.

For more information
Please contact your Chief Field Education Programme or UNRWA HQ Education Department on:
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UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 with a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to registered Palestine refugees in the Agency’s area of operations, namely the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. Thousands of Palestine refugees who lost both their homes and livelihood because of the 1948 conflict have remained displaced and in need of significant support for over seventy years. UNRWA helps them achieve their full potential in human development through quality services it provides in education, health care, relief and social services, protection, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.