



Worldwide Closure of Educational Institutions due to COVID-19

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Why in News

According to the estimates of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) the **COVID-19** outbreak has pulled almost **half (49.22%) the world's student population out of schools and universities.**

UNESCO has also observed that 107 countries have announced a temporary closure of educational institutions, **impacting 86.17 crore children and youth.**

COVID-19

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has named the new coronavirus disease as **'COVID-19'**.
- The new name is taken from the words **"corona", "virus" and "disease", with 2019** representing the year when it emerged (the outbreak was reported to the WHO on 31st December, 2019).
- The word coronavirus refers to the **group of viruses it belongs to**, rather than the latest strain. The latest strain has been designated 'Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)' by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has also declared COVID-19 as a **pandemic.**
According to the WHO, a pandemic is declared when a new disease for which people do not have immunity spreads around the world beyond expectations.

Key Points

- **Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions :**
 - The **World Health Organisation (WHO)** recommends school closure (including preschool and higher education) as one of the “**Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs)**” for mitigating influenza pandemics.
 - Nonpharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs) are actions, **apart from getting vaccinated and taking medicine**, that people and communities can take to help slow the spread of illnesses like pandemic influenza (flu).
- **Reasons:**
 - The main reason for keeping educational institutions closed is that children and young people can be **vectors of transmission**.
 - There are also **high contact rates** in schools which could result in the spread of the virus.
 - The school closures during a pandemic are expected to **break the chains of transmission** of COVID-19 in turn it will **reduce the number of confirmed cases, avoiding stressing healthcare systems**.
 - It will also help to **delay possible transmission** and will also allow **more time to develop a vaccine**.
- **Economic Costs Involved:**
 - The closure of education institutions **not only disrupts learning but also has a direct economic cost**.
 - Because when schools close, families would have **to find childcare**.
 - While some may manage to look after children without missing work, many parents will **end up skipping work**. Those lost work hours are a cost to the economy.
 - A study published in the BMC Public Health journal in April 2008 suggested that a **12-week closure of schools in the UK** during an influenza pandemic could **cost about 0.2-1% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**.
- **Disadvantages:**
 - **Loss of Nutrition:** When schools close, children's **nutrition is compromised**. This is already evident in India, where the closure of schools has disrupted the supply of **midday meals**.
 - **Access to Internet:** As schools and universities move towards learning online to make up for lost time, students from low-income families **risk falling behind** as they **don't have access to technology or stable Internet connections**.
 - **Issues with Distance Learning:** The parents of first-generation learners in schools are often **unprepared for distance learning and home-schooling**.
- **Measures:**
 - Countries are adopting **distance learning solutions** to ensure continuity of education.
 - The UNESCO has set up a **COVID-19 task force** to advise countries in regular virtual meetings with Education Ministers.

Indian Scenario

- In India, the closure of schools started towards the end of the academic year. Hence, as of now, it **hasn't caused any significant learning loss**.
- The Ministry of Human Resource Development has decided to encourage schools and universities to make full use of **existing e-learning portals**.
- These e-learning portals include the **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), platform SWAYAM**, and the free DTH channel Swayam Prabha, which telecasts educational videos prepared by the NCERT.
 - **Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)** is a free Web-based distance learning program that is designed for the participation of large numbers of geographically dispersed students.
 - **SWAYAM platform** is indigenously developed by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) with the help of Microsoft. It is designed to achieve the three cardinal principles of Education Policy viz. access, equity and quality.

UNESCO

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded in **1945** to develop the “intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind” as a means of building lasting peace.
- It is located in **Paris (France)**.
- It develops educational tools to help people live as global citizens free of hate and intolerance.
- It also aims to promote cultural heritage and the equal dignity of all cultures with strengthening bonds among nations.

Source: IE