



Reopening Protocols for Schools

Ensuring Safe Operations for School Staff and Students

Welcome Back

"We thank God for the experiences we have gone through, the challenges we have learned from, and the circumstances that have made us."

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

We have come through a difficult time, made possible by the strength and unity of the community.

Our highest priority has always been, and remains, the safety and security of our community.

Today is about preparing to respond effectively, together as a community.

Objectives

By the end of this protocol
you will be:

1 Aware of preparations needed for reopening

2 Informed on roles and responsibilities

3 Ready to respond in case of an emergency

4 Prepared for effective communication

Guiding Principles

1



People First

- Students and staff safety first
- Lives first, always
- Never go back for possessions – leave them behind

2



Stay Indoors

- Indoors only
- No outdoor activities or assemblies

3



Safe Zones

- Avoid windows, glass, and open areas
- Move to safe zones when needed
- Identify assembly point

4



Official Alerts

- Follow official alerts immediately
- No unofficial info or social media

5



Dual Delivery

- Both in-person and online learning options acceptable
- Separate learning environments i.e., online or in-person
- Same teacher must not do both at the same time

Possessions and buildings can be replaced,
but lives cannot be compensated.

Environment Readiness

Indoor Operations and Safe Zones

Space Requirements

- Solid walls, concrete roof, no exposure to external areas
- Ventilation available without exposure to a dangerous source
- Emergency exits and assembly points identified and clearly marked

Safe Zone Rules

- Designated away from windows and glass
- If no safe zone exists, the room must not be used
- Reachable within 1 minute from any location
- Multiple safe zones per building to cover all areas
- Easy access without crossing outdoor or exposed areas

Planning and Mapping

- Safe zones clearly marked on evacuation maps and emergency plans
- Every staff member must know safe zones in their room
- Distributed across the building for quick access

Training and Readiness

- All staff trained on protocols and familiar with evacuation routes
- Roles assigned in advance, not on the day
- Emergency go-bag ready in every room (first aid, register, contact details)



- KHDA approval required before reopening
- No School may operate without signing the KHDA reopening Acknowledgment and Consent Form

Supervision and Wellbeing

Your calm matters more than you think. Students look to you – a steady voice and relaxed body language can prevent panic before it starts.

Students

Supervised and supported at all times

- Fixed routines maintained to provide stability
- Monitor for anxiety, regression or behaviour changes
- Log and report concerns — do not dismiss

Staff

Your calm is the most powerful tool

- No fear-inducing language or imagery
- Respond to distress with sensitivity
- Staff wellbeing equally prioritised

Environment

Safe, calm and never alone

- Positive, calm atmosphere always
- Minimum two staff per room during an alert
- No one manages an emergency alone
- Support is available – you don't have to cope alone

Remember: During exceptional periods, students may show signs of regression or anxiety. These must be logged and reported and not ignored.

Understanding Your Stress Response

What your body does

The threat response — fight or flight

- Heart races**
Blood pumps faster to prepare your muscles for action
- Breathing becomes shallow**
Quick, short breaths — your body wants more oxygen fast
- Tunnel vision**
Focus narrows to the threat — everything else blurs
- Muscles tense**
Your body braces — shoulders rise, jaw tightens

How to take back control

Simple techniques that actually work

- 1 Box breathing**
Breathe in for 4 seconds; hold for 4; breathe out for 4; hold for 4. Repeat 3 times. Slows your heart rate immediately.
- 2 Feet flat, feel the floor**
Press both feet firmly to the ground. This physical anchor brings you back to the present.
- 3 5-4-3-2-1 grounding**
Name 5 things you see · 4 you can hear · 3 you can touch · 2 you smell · 1 you can taste. Breaks tunnel vision fast.
- 4 Long exhale**
Breathe in normally, exhale slowly for twice as long. Activates your body's natural calm response.

You are more capable than you feel in that moment. *These responses are your body protecting you - work with them, not against them.*

This is normal. When we sense threat, our bodies respond automatically - it's biology, not weakness. Understanding what's happening helps you take back control.

Psychological First Aid (PFA)

An immediate humane response for students experiencing distress after a crisis or emergency. It aims to provide practical care and support, reduce distress, and help meet basic needs.

1. Look

- Observe students for signs of distress or emotional reactions.
- Check the surrounding environment to make sure it is safe and identify anyone who may need urgent assistance.

2. Listen

- Approach affected students calmly.
- Listen to their concerns without pressure, help reassure them and reduce fear, and use a calm, reassuring tone of voice.

3. Link

- Make sure the student is in a safe place, reassure them, and guide them toward simple steps that help restore a sense of calm.
- Connect students with appropriate support when needed, such as specialists, social workers, or school counsellors.
- Help them access assistance as quickly as possible.

Supporting Students of Determination (1/2)

Motor Difficulties

- Assign a dedicated evacuation buddy – confirmed before reopening, not on the day
- Use evacuation chairs where available – staff must know their location and how to use them
- Never use lifts under any circumstances
- If the student cannot be moved, direct to the nearest safe rescue point and stay with them – do not leave to rejoin the group
- Staff responsibility: practice the route with the student during calm periods, so it is not new in an emergency

Visual Impairments

- Provide continuous verbal description of every step and direction – narrate what is happening throughout
- Guide physically – place your hand on the student's shoulder and lead calmly at their pace
- Never leave unaccompanied at any point – stay with the student until confirmed safe at the assembly point
- Staff responsibility: walk the evacuation route with the student regularly, so they are familiar with it before an emergency

Supporting Students of Determination (2/2)

Hearing Impairments

- Never rely on verbal alarms alone – confirm the student has received the alert before moving
- Use clear visual signals: flashing lights, firm hand signals, or pre-prepared written cards
- Maintain direct eye contact throughout – face the student when giving any instruction
- Staff responsibility: visual alert cards must be prepared, labelled, and kept in the room at all times – not made in an emergency

Autism & Sensory Needs

- Use noise-cancelling headphones to reduce distress from alarms – keep them in the room, not in a storeroom
- Use visual PECS cards to explain each step in sequence, one instruction at a time
- Keep communication calm, short, and predictable – avoid raised voices or sudden changes in tone
- Named key person must remain with the student for the entire evacuation – handover to another adult only when the student is settled and safe
- Staff responsibility: practice the evacuation sequence with the student using PECS cards

Daily Operations and Emergency Response

Entry, dismissal, supervision, wellbeing, and response

Responding to Alerts

SHELTER



Local incident, no direct impact

Projectile or falling debris

- Never leave students unattended to investigate an alert
- Stay with your group until an official instruction is received
- Your place is with the students NOT at the source of the sound
- Monitor official alerts and news

EVACUATE



Fire, smoke, or gas leak

Suspicious object on or near premises (do not touch)

- Stop all activity and issue a calm, firm instruction
- Check route to assembly point is clear before moving anyone
- Walk quickly and in an orderly line – no running
- Strollers must always be ready for immediate use
- Call 997 and 999

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

- Isolate the affected student without disrupting the rest of the group
- A second staff member immediately takes over group supervision
- The group must never be left unattended while first aid is being given
- Call 998 if the situation is life-threatening – do not wait

Two Operational Risk Levels

● GREEN – Low Risk / Stable

- No alert messages
- Normal day continues
- Use indoor facilities
- Enhance readiness at all times
- Morning assembly and outdoor activities suspended

● RED – Potential Danger

- Switch to distance learning and remote work
- Do not resume on-site learning without official approval
- Authorities identify high-risk locations to determine response

The relevant authorities determine the risk levels.
All alert messages must be taken seriously and acted upon immediately.

Phase 1: Before Arriving at School

No alert

- Student leaves home as usual for school, either with a parent/guardian or independently

Alert before departure

Do not leave home. Await official all clear

Alert received while en route

Proceed to the nearest safe, covered location

School transportation services are suspended until further notice

Phase 2: At Drop Off

No alert

- Students enter the building directly
- No morning assembly
- No gatherings at gates, courtyards, or external sidewalks

Alert issued

- Parent/guardian enters with the student immediately if entry is safe
- No waiting outside the school

Remember:

Even under GREEN conditions, morning assembly and outdoor gatherings are suspended.

Phase 3: While Inside the School

No alert

- Classes continue as normal
- No morning assembly
- No activities in courtyards, open areas, or near windows/glass
- Break time is held inside classrooms

Alert issued

- Stop all activities immediately
- Move to nearest safe zone
- Students sit in low, calm position away from windows and glass

Staff outside the building:

Proceed immediately to the nearest safe interior facility. Remaining in open areas is prohibited. In exceptional cases (injury, casualty, or facility impact), the relevant authorities organise dismissal.

Phase 4: During Dismissal and Return

No alert

- Dismissal proceeds normally in an organised, swift, and gradual manner

Alert issued

- Dismissal is suspended immediately
- Students are not allowed outside the building

Alert during dismissal

With parent/guardian:

- Proceed to a safe place
- No standing in open areas

Student alone:

- Proceed to a safe place immediately
- Do not go out until alert is lifted

When alert is lifted

- Dismissal resumes in an organised, gradual manner
- Students handed over to parents/guardians in an organised way
- Gatherings in front of gates and sidewalks are prohibited

Rapid Response - The First 3 Minutes

Three critical minutes can determine full control of the situation and prevent a disaster in the school environment

1

Minute 1: Response and decision

Based on the directions given and alert type, make the appropriate immediate decision: evacuate or shelter in place.

2

Minute 2: Orderly movement

Direct students calmly and without panic according to the pre-designated safe evacuation or shelter procedures.

3

Minute 3: Assembly and headcount

Reach the assembly point or safe shelter area and immediately begin counting students and reporting any missing persons.

Firm direction

- Stop any explanation, shouting, or unclear instructions.
- Give students a clear and direct command to leave everything and follow instructions.
- **Suggested command:**
“Leave your belongings and line up quietly.”

Check the route

- Make sure the route is safe before directing students to move, to avoid exposing them to danger.
- Watch for any signs of smoke, fire, or obstacles in the corridor or nearby area.

After the All-Clear

The response does not end when the danger passes. Follow these four steps in order:

1

Return Protocol

- Await direction from the School Principal only – no independent decisions on when to return
- Return to rooms in an organised, supervised manner

2

Final Headcount

- Recount all students, staff, and visitors immediately upon return
- Verify the general condition of each student – note any signs of distress or physical harm

3

Documentation

- Complete the incident report form – record all injuries, damages, actions taken, and exact times
- Submit to school management – do not delay or complete from memory

4

Ongoing Support

- Activate psychological support for any distressed students – do not wait for them to escalate
- Notify parents through the approved channel only – keep the message clear, calm, and factual

Roles and Responsibilities

School Principals and Teachers

School Principal is responsible for:

1

making sure every staff member is trained on all outlined protocols and participates in practice drills or routines

2

assigning roles to relevant staff members to cover all emergency procedures

3

effectively communicating all required protocol procedures to parents

4

staff members ensuring that students have rehearsed the relevant procedures and routines

KHDA and relevant authorities may conduct monitoring visits from time to time.

Teacher's responsibilities:

1 On-site leader

Manage the evacuation calmly and direct students clearly toward safe evacuation routes.

2 Protector and guide

Ensure all students are evacuated from classrooms and facilities, and make sure no student is left behind.

3 Communication link

Communicate effectively with school leadership and emergency response teams to report on student status and absences.

4 First responder

Provide basic first aid and initial psychological support to students until rescue teams arrive.

You are the first responder in protecting lives and property.

Staff Readiness Checklist

Complete before reopening – and review regularly. If you cannot answer yes to every question, act now – not during an emergency.

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	TOOLS & EQUIPMENT	STUDENTS' NEEDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know all evacuation routes from my room? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know the assembly point for my group? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know when to evacuate vs shelter-in-place? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I tell an official alert from an unofficial one? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know my exact role and responsibilities in an emergency? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Have I physically walked all evacuation routes? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I perform basic first aid, including CPR? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I manage a distressed group without escalating panic? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I apply Psychological First Aid (Look, Listen, Link)? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I safely carry or move a non-mobile student during evacuation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is my room's Go-Bag stocked, accessible, and checked this week? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does it contain: first aid kit, register, emergency contacts and medical info? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Are strollers ready for immediate use? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is the evacuation map posted clearly and up to date in my room? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I have the School Principal's direct number saved and accessible? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know every student with additional or medical needs in my group? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is there an individual evacuation plan for each of those children? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does every student with additional needs have a named buddy or key person? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is all required medication and emergency equipment accessible at all times? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Am I actively monitoring for signs of distress or behavior changes?

Communication and Compliance

Parent engagement, access controls
and your responsibilities

Parent Communication

How we communicate in a crisis defines how parents trust us. Every word matters.

✓ Official channels only

Direct all parents to approved School communications.
No personal numbers, no WhatsApp groups, no informal messages.

✓ Keep parents informed

Share clear, calm updates before, during, and after any incident.
Tell them what is happening, what is being done, and what to expect next.

✓ Never release without contact

Exhaust every emergency contact if a parent cannot be reached.
No student is released until an authorised person is confirmed.
Document every attempt.

The School Principal is the sole authorised voice. All other staff refer parents to management — no exceptions.

✗ Photograph or film anything

Causes panic, violates privacy, obstructs the response, and carries legal consequences

✗ Answer individual parent calls

While an incident is underway your focus must be entirely on the students in your care

✗ Share unconfirmed information

No personal opinions, no rumours, no unofficial updates in any form or on any platform

✗ Issue the all-clear yourself

Never pre-empt the School Principal. Wait for official confirmation before saying anything to parents

External Communication Protocol

All staff are strictly prohibited from photographing, recording, or publishing any information about the incident on social media.

Protecting privacy

Photographing students in vulnerable situations is a violation of their privacy.

Preventing the spread of rumors

Fragmented or incomplete information can create panic and misinformation.

Maintaining a single official channel

The school principal is the only authorised person to issue official statements.

Avoiding disruption to the response

Uncontrolled communications can overwhelm emergency networks and hinder operations.

Photography during emergencies is prohibited both legally and ethically.

Health & Safety Lead Responsibilities

Compliance gatekeeper

Audit the environment against KHDA reopening criteria (solid walls, concrete roof, ventilation, marked exits, safe zones reachable within 1 minute) and confirm the signed KHDA acknowledgment and Consent Form is in place before any reopening.

Drill and training lead

Plan, run, and debrief shelter-in-place and evacuation drills with staff and students; track training completion across all staff on PFA (Look, Listen, Link), basic first aid, and CPR; brief new joiners before they enter classrooms.

Equipment custodian

Maintain and weekly-check every room's Go-Bag (first aid kit, register, emergency contacts, medical info), evacuation chairs, noise-cancelling headphones, PECS cards, visual alert cards, and strollers; confirm evacuation maps are posted and current in every room.

Individualized plans for Students of Determination

Verify every student with additional needs has a named buddy or key person, an individual evacuation plan, and accessible medication; confirm routes have been walked with the student during calm periods — not improvised on the day.

Authority liaison and documentation

Serve as the school's primary link to Civil Defence (997), ambulance (998), and police (999); maintain the incident and hazard register; submit incident reports and risk updates to the Principal and KHDA through approved channels.

Risk monitoring

Track official alerts and escalate immediately to the Principal; identify and log hazards on an ongoing basis (not only after incidents); ensure morning assembly and outdoor activity suspensions are enforced even under GREEN conditions.

Principal's Checklist

1 Train staff

Train all staff on protocols.
Use a train-the-trainer model to cascade using KHDA materials

2 Dual delivery

Separate provision for in-person and distance learners. Hybrid must not disrupt learning or overburden teachers

3 Staff wellbeing

Protect the wellbeing of all teachers and support staff throughout the reopening process.

4 Emergency plans

Submit shelter-in-place, evacuation, and emergency plans as part of application submission. Conduct drills with staff and students.

5 Submit data

E.g., on-site vs online students, on-site vs remote staff, school bus numbers etc. (*specific data points TBC*)

6 Contacts

Provide details for school leads and both parents of each enrolled student.

Pre-requisites for Reopening

1. Need to complete the application form if not already submitted

2. Attend Training

- All schools must attend the KHDA reopening training session
- Attendance must be registered to confirm participation

3. Sign Declaration

- Schools sign a declaration confirming staff have completed the training and all required safety assessments are in place
- The signed acknowledgement and consent form
- is the school's proof of readiness
- Date of intended reopening required on the acknowledgement and consent form

4. Safe Zone Inspection

- A KHDA team will visit every school and nursery to assess safe zones against an agreed rubric
- All visits to be completed by mid-week

5. Approval to Reopen

- Schools receive KHDA approval to reopen once the inspection is cleared
- Staggered reopening is permitted — cycle by cycle if preferred — based on each school's readiness

Have a question?

Scan the QR code to submit any questions related to the reopening protocols or other related matters.

Your questions will help us compile a FAQ to support the sector.

Education Institution Physical
Reopening Readiness Questions



Key Reminders

**Safety first. Indoor only. Follow official alerts.
Communicate through approved channels.**

Appendix

Practical Scenarios

Training Scenario 1: Sudden Alarm

Situation: During class in the middle of the day, the fire alarm suddenly sounded continuously. Some students were startled and began shouting, while others moved randomly toward the door.

Immediate Control

Direct students in a calm, audible voice:

"Stop where you are."

This helps prevent pushing and confusion and restores order in the classroom.

Check the Route

Open the classroom door with extreme caution and confirm that the corridor is clear of smoke or fire before evacuating students.

Orderly Evacuation

Guide students to leave in an orderly line and move calmly toward the designated assembly point according to the evacuation plan.

Training Scenario 2: Evacuation Amid Disorder

Situation: During the evacuation, some students began pushing in the corridor because they saw light smoke, and one of them fell to the ground in the middle of the panic.

Challenge: How do you regain control of the students and continue the evacuation without stopping it completely?

Correct Response

1

Give a firm and clear command to stop the pushing immediately.

2

Help the fallen student quickly and calmly back to their feet.

3

Restore order and continue the evacuation safely.

Firm control prevents disasters.

Training Scenario 3: An Injured Student

Situation: During the evacuation on the stairs, one student tripped and fell, resulting in a leg injury and inability to stand, while other students continued moving behind him.

1 Secure the route immediately

Calm the students around the injured student and continue the evacuation in an orderly manner to prevent crowding.

3 Call for immediate assistance

Send a student only if appropriate under your emergency procedures, or use the fastest available means to alert the school emergency team.

2 Quick assessment

Check the student's condition without moving them if there is a suspected fracture or severe injury, to reduce the risk of complications.

4 Stay with the injured student

Remain with the injured student, reassure them, and provide any safe basic assistance possible until rescue or medical support arrives.