



Paediatric Association of Nigeria (PAN)

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PRESS RELEASE

DELAY REOPENING OF SCHOOLS IN COVID-19 IN NIGERIA : IS IT WORTH THE WAIT?

Paediatric Association of Nigeria (PAN) has followed with concern the current debate in the public space on the advisability or otherwise of reopening schools in Nigeria at this time of Covid-19, especially the Basic and Secondary schools.

2. PAN notes the announcement on 2nd July of the planned opening of schools in August, 2020 and the reversal of this decision by the Honorable Minister of Education on 9th July, 2020. This was quickly followed by the recent release of the "Guidelines for Schools and Learning Facilities Reopening after Covid-19 Pandemic Closures" published by the Federal Ministry of Education on 13th July 2020.

Only three days ago, it was reported that the Minister of State for Education, Mr. Chukwuemeka Nwajuiba, has requested the proprietors of schools in Nigeria "to undertake self-assessment and send feedback to state ministries of education not later than 29th July, 2020". The Minister was reported to have said that the request is coming just as Nigeria settles with four countries on a new date for the suspended West African Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE).

Furthermore, "a senior official" of Federal Ministry of Education was also reported as saying that, "barring any sudden change in plans, schools in Nigeria would reopen in September, 2020".

3. As a professional association whose fundamental objective is to "actively seek the well-being of children and ensure that their right to quality health care is protected", Paediatric Association of Nigeria views it as a professional responsibility to publicly express its opinion in the ongoing national discourse.

4. The opinion of PAN as expressed here is based on the following factors, among others:
- currently available consistent scientific facts about Covid-19 published and accepted by the scientific community;
 - the fact that these scientific facts are rapidly evolving and changing;
 - the trend in the incidence of Covid-19 infection in Nigeria;
 - the recognition that children need structured school environment for optimal learning and realization of their full potentials;
 - the capacity of the Nigerian health system to quickly respond to unexpected increase in the incidence of Covid-19; and
 - the experiences of other countries where reopening of schools have recently been tried.

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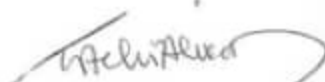
5. Figures from Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), show exponential rise in Covid-19 incidence and deaths. It would appear that Nigeria has, at this time, not reached its peak incidence of the pandemic.
6. Obviously, Nigerian health care system is grossly ill-equipped to absorb sudden surges in cases of Covid-19 in our schools.
7. We are still learning about the effect of Covid-19 in the human body including the long-term effect of the virus in various organs, even in asymptomatic carriers including children.
8. Ghana which reopened its schools three week ago has reported 55 new Covid-19 cases in students of Accra Girls Senior High School alone within two weeks of reopening.


Consequently, PAN supports the continued closure of Nigerian schools and urge that the schools should remain closed until conditions are safe. The minimum criterion for considering the reopening of schools in Nigeria should be a steady and consistent decline in the spread of Covid-19 in most parts of the country. It is then and only then, we believe, that the other criteria as laid down by the Guidelines for Schools and Learning Facilities Reopening after Covid-19 Pandemic Closures can now be considered.

PAN observes, with surprise, the absence of public health physicians, infectious disease experts and other child and adolescent healthcare specialists amongst the stakeholders listed as having been consulted in arriving at the decision to possibly reopen schools in September, 2020. We urge that this error be corrected to enable the decision-makers arrive at a fact-oriented, balanced and independent decision on such an important issue bordering on the health of our children.

It is our considered opinion that, to a large extent, the safest place for children at this time is at home under the care of their parents. Many parents now have to undertake the extra duty of controlling, protecting and (in some cases) supervising the academic work of the children, duties which have traditionally been shared with teachers and school administrators. PAN encourages these and would want our parents to regard their sacrifices, not just as a duty to their families but as a national duty at this time of war with Coronavirus.

Delay reopening of schools IS WORTH THE WAIT!


Prof. Edward Alikor
PAN President 20th
July, 2020


Dr. Petronila Tabansi
PAN Secretary