



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS (NDC)

COVID-19 TECHNICAL TEAM – MEDIA STATEMENT

NEW AND INCREASING INFECTION CASES FOLLOWING REOPENING OF SCHOOLS

ACCRA, 12/07/2020 – The NDC COVID-19 Technical Team offered recommendations to the government on the modalities for reopening schools in our last media statement dated 11/06/2020. The principal recommendation was for Government to reconsider the decision to return final year students of secondary and tertiary institutions to school to write their final year exams. This recommendation was made in light of the acceleration in new COVID-19 cases in the weeks preceding the reopening of schools, and on the basis of insights from the testing data that pointed to extensive community spread of the virus and self-evident challenges in managing the crisis.

However, in anticipation of the government’s obstinate insistence on this unwise course, our recommendations also included a number of clear proposals for minimizing the risk to students and teaching staff. This included mass testing of students returning to residential institutions; regular testing of teaching and non-teaching staff; communication of protocols for managing outbreaks on campus to parents and guardians; and ensuring that all schools have the necessary space and resources to isolate suspected cases. These practical steps were drawn from best practices in public health. Unfortunately, Government ignored these prudent risk-mitigation measures and proceeded to reopen schools.

The inevitable consequences of this decision have manifested as infections among the student bodies at certain secondary institutions, and the isolation of suspected cases at others. The management of these situations has heightened anxiety among students, teachers and parents, and has given well-meaning Ghanaians serious cause for concern. The resulting mental stress on students is not conducive for preparing and sitting for exams, and parents are understandably agitated in their demand for the decision to reopen schools to be reconsidered. Kenya and Nigeria - acknowledging the public health risks - have already reversed similar decisions. Ghana should follow suit; extensive community spread, the failure to screen staff and students, and the mixing of students from various communities suggests the risk of infections in senior high schools is substantial.

We also note with concern the decision of the Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC) to enter secondary institutions to register final year students on campus. The ban on parental visits was meant to reduce the risk of importing cases onto these campuses. The presence of EC officials and political party representatives on campuses for such an exercise presents schools and their students with the same risk. This is an unacceptable additional risk in an already precarious situation, and given the current strain on the public health and medical systems.

Government has deemed it prudent to close several of its own institutions following workplace infections, including the Supreme Court, BOST, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance and COCOBOD. The lives of Ghanaian students, teachers and non-teaching staff should be valued equally, and Government must take immediate steps to reverse its decision and to begin the process of returning students to their homes. This will necessarily include mass testing of students to ascertain their COVID-19 status before they are released to their parents, to minimize the risk of exporting cases from campuses to communities. It is also recommended - as has been done in Nigeria - that the final exams be postponed until such a time as our public health system is resourced and responsive enough to provide a safe environment for the students. Barring that, it will be necessary to explore digital solutions for the completion of the exams, bearing in mind and proactively accounting for the unequal access to internet services.

We urge Government to act expeditiously in this matter, as it ultimately bears moral responsibility for any COVID-19 infections on campuses and for any adverse outcomes for Ghanaian students, their families and their teachers.

Signed for and on behalf of the NDC COVID-19 Technical Team.



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