

Conducting examinations in the worst-case scenario of an Omicron outbreak

12 Feb, 2022

1. With the recent outbreak of the Omicron virus in the High Risk Areas and Red Zones, there is possibility of disruption to the Class X and XII examinations due to further outbreaks during the examination period. In order to prepare for the worst-case scenario of a bad outbreak of the Omicron virus, and to ensure that all students are able to do their examinations with certainty and a high level of safety, the following four strategies have been developed to cover all schools in Bhutan.

a. Schools in Low Risk Areas

- i. Schools in Low Risk Areas shall hold their examinations in containment mode for boarding students, and in walk-in mode for schools with all day scholars.
- ii. If the school has both day scholars and boarders, all day scholars are required to move into containment mode with the boarders.
- iii. In the schools in (ii) above, teachers, supervising examiners and invigilators are required to stay in containment mode until the examinations are over.
- iv. If the school cannot accommodate all the day scholars, the examination room for day scholars and boarders should be different to ensure no mixing of boarders and day scholars. Day scholars should be asked to come directly to school before the examination and directly go home after the examination, and avoid mixing with the public.

b. Throngs with Mega zones in Low Risk Areas

- i. In large throngs like Thimphu where most of the students are day scholars, students should do their examinations in schools that have been identified within their own Mega zone. This will ensure that in the worst-case scenario of an outbreak, all students will still be able to do their examinations in their Mega zones.
- ii. Boarding schools should ensure that all students do their examinations while in full containment. If there are day scholars, these students should join the other students in containment.

c. Schools in High Risk Remote Areas

- i. Schools with boarding facilities should have all their students in containment during the examinations.
- ii. Schools without boarding facilities should try and relocate their day scholars to a boarding facility. If this is not possible, students should be allowed to walk-in to do their examinations. Students should be asked to come directly to school before the examination and directly go home after the examination, and avoid mixing with the public.

- iii. In the event schools are able to contain all students, then the teachers, supervising examiners and invigilators will be required to live in containment mode.
 - If day scholars are relocated to new school, BCSEA should be informed to prepare for logistics. The dzongkhag administration shall be responsible for the transportation of question-answer booklets to the new school with full security.
 - d. *Schools in High Risk Urban Area and Red Zones*
 - i. The preferred option for these schools is to relocate the students, teachers, supervising examiners and invigilators to a safer location within that Dzongkhag or another Dzongkhag.
 - If the school is relocated to a safer location, BCSEA should be informed to prepare for logistics. The dzongkhag administration shall be responsible for the transportation of question-answer booklets to the new school with full security.
 - ii. If relocation is not possible, the students, teachers, supervising examiners and invigilators should be kept in containment.
 - iii. Students should not be allowed to walk-in for examinations, and all day scholars should be kept in containment.
 - iv. Security assessment of the school should be done by the Dzongkhag Task Force to ensure that the containment facility can be fully secured – no unauthorized person should be able to enter or leave the containment center during the time of the examination. Based on RBP advice, Desuups should be deployed to monitor the exits, entrances and any other area in the containment area.
 - v. The SOP for delivery of essential items to the school should be strictly implemented to ensure there is no mixing of people delivering the goods and people receiving the goods. Goods should be stored as per SOP.
 - vi. A medical person shall be stationed at the school to provide medical assistance within the school.
-

2. *Conduct of examinations in case of an outbreak during the examination period*

Given the mild nature of the Omicron variant, and based on the experience gained in some schools in the Red Zones where several students were infected with the virus, had mild symptoms and have recovered without needing hospitalization, the Technical Advisory Group from the Ministry of Health, has approved conducting examinations even in the event there is an Omicron outbreak in the school during the examination period. This approval has been provided after considering all the pros and cons of the situation.

It may be noted that if the Containment Centers are well secured and all SOPs are stringently followed, no outbreak should take place within the Containment Center and all the students should be able to take the examination safely even if there is an outbreak in that locality.

The following SOP has been approved by the Ministry of Health in case of an Omicron outbreak during examinations:

- a) If possible, for schools in containment, the school shall identify a small dormitory for housing positive students as an isolation facility, and a classroom where positive students can continue doing their examinations, if they so desire.
 - Invigilators conducting the examinations for these students should be provided with PPE gear and housed separately.
 - b) If possible, for day scholars, a hotel/house shall be identified as an isolation facility where students who become positive can be accommodated and can continue to do their examinations.
 - Invigilators conducting the examinations for these students should be provided with PPE gear and housed separately.
 - c) During the examinations:
 - I. There will be no routine testing for mild signs and symptoms of respiratory illnesses.
 - II. Testing will be limited to those with moderate to severe respiratory illnesses.
 - III. Any moderate to severe cases that test positive will be isolated immediately
 - IV. If there is a positive case, all students will be considered as Primary Contacts and will be allowed to continue their examinations without testing unless they develop severe disease
 - Invigilators conducting the examinations for these students should be provided with PPE gear and housed separately.
 - d) For students who become sick or positive during the examination, MOE/BCSEA shall make alternate arrangements to enable the students to complete their examinations.
 - I. They should be able to continue their examinations in the separate isolation facility, or
 - II. They should be allowed to continue their examinations at a later date using standby question papers.
 - e) After the completion of the examination, all students shall be tested:
 - I. If everyone tests negative, they shall be allowed to go home,
 - II. If any student/staff tests positive during this time, or has tested positive during the examination, the staff/students shall be required to stay in the containment facility for a period determined by the Ministry of Health.
-

3. *Other Safety Measures*

- a) All students shall be RT-PCR tested before they enter Containment Centers.
 - b) All students eligible for booster shots should be identified and vaccinated at the earliest.
 - c) Students and Staff of one class should not mix with other groups/classes
 - d) Everyone should wear a face-mask at all times, and should wash their hands frequently.
 - e) All examination halls should have good ventilation/windows and doors that should be kept open at all times.
-

The Ministry of Education shall take out a notification regarding Section 2 and Section 3 of this Note, informing all parents and students about the manner in which the examinations will be conducted in the event of an outbreak. The MOE shall also facilitate relocation of students to safer schools in case they are not comfortable with the above manner in which the examinations will be conducted.

Where possible, the Ministry of Education will also facilitate for students to do their examinations in their own Dzongkhags instead of travelling to their schools for the examinations. This should especially be facilitated, if the student's school is in the High Risk Area or Red Zone.

The Ministry of Education and the Dzongkhag Task Forces shall facilitate travel of students wanting to go to their schools for their examinations. Priority shall be given to students, who need to travel to other areas for the examinations, for quarantine facilities in the High Risk Area and Red Zones.

Approved by NC19TF