



# PRESS RELEASE



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## **ANNOUNCEMENT OF OMICRON RESPONSE IN SCHOOLS FOR 1<sup>ST</sup> SEMESTER OF 2022**

- The Ministry of Education (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education Yoo Eunhae) announced its plan to respond to Omicron in K-12, special schools and higher education institutions for the 1<sup>st</sup> Semester of 2022 on February 7 (Mon), 2022.
- This plan focuses on establishing a swift response system by having schools and communities at the center in the case of emergency such as the surge in the Omicron variant while taking into account the specific features of the Omicron infection and the quarantine system as a whole to revise the academic and school operation mechanism.

### **【 Background and Current Trend 】**

- The Ministry of Education has been supporting schools to ensure their activities continue without disruption in close consultation with the health authorities after the first case of COVID-19 infection took place in January 2020 to make all nationwide schools safe.
- Nevertheless, with the recent surge in the Omicron infection, the number of teens and those in their 20's confirmed with the virus has been on the rise.

- Although the second dose vaccination rate of those aged 13-18 is as high as 75.3% (as of Feb. 4), and the rate for those aged 20-29 is at 97.3%, which is high compared to other age groups, given that children aged 12 has only just begun to get vaccinated, let alone that 11-year olds haven't even begun their vaccination yet, schools must be extremely cautious with school activities and operation.

## 【 How to Operate K-12 and Special Schools 】

- The Ministry of Education has strengthened measures to prevent COVID-19 infection in schools in consideration of the Omicron variant, and has shifted its academic operation and COVID response system so that it can flexibly respond to infection spread in accordance with regional and school-wide infection trends in tailored approach.

### < Shift in Response System >

		Present	After
School Infection Prevention	Diagnosis System is set	Probe conducted by health authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ If a confirmed case occurs, the school itself conducts probe to test and manage the case</li> <li>▶ Schools provide rapid antigen test kits</li> <li>▶ Students at dormitory and student athletes are tested regularly with rapid antigen test kits</li> <li>▶ Mobile PCR Team pays a visit to schools</li> </ul>
	Standard is set	Central Govt. Level	<p style="text-align: center;">School Level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Academic plans are flexibly adjusted in consideration of school/class sizes and specificities of each grades, etc.</li> <li>* Full-scale online schooling should only be introduced with cautiously</li> <li>* Kindergarteners, 1-2 graders, special school students, children at nursery and students of small-sized, rural schools should be allowed to go to school everyday</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengthening Autonomy of Schools and Communities</b></p>
Academic Affairs Operation	Standard is executed	School-wide Operation	
	Operation	MOE	

### 1 Efforts to Make Schools Safer

- A safe school environment is created by revising school disinfection measures and stocking up on PPE.

- It is recommended to wear respirator-grade masks (KF80 or above), and to allow ventilation all the time along with other COVID guidelines. It is also recommended to continue to encourage vaccination of students and school staff while deploying 70,000 additional staff in schools around the country to monitor COVID prevention measures.
  - In accordance with the revised COVID response guidances vis-a-vis self-quarantine measures, self-health monitoring mobile app is revised, and if anyone in the household, two rounds of rapid antigen tests (and when negative result is confirmed) should be taken before being allowed to come to school as a means of safeguarding students' right to education as much as possible.
  - It is mandated to install partitions inside school cafeteria (as of Dec. 2021; 99.4% of schools have already installed partitions), and designate a seat for each student so that when someone is confirmed, it would be easy to trace their tracks. Schools should also have ample amount of supplies for disinfection activities.
- Given that the transmission rate of the Omicron is 2-3 times higher than the Delta variant, schools should have additional response measures in place in line with the guidelines of the health authority.
- When a confirmed case occurs in school, they should be categorized into different groups, complying with the standards presented by the health authority, to support the provision of rapid antigen tests and PCR tests.
  - If anyone shows symptoms after a contact with a confirmed person, or if they are at high health risk, they have to get tested at nearby screening centers. They can come to school if the test result is negative. Others who show no symptoms after a contact with a confirmed person are required to take more than three rapid antigen

tests over the course of seven days and confirm negative test results to be able to come to school.

- Moreover, rapid antigen test kits should be supplied to schools to the extent that they can be administered to 20% of school staff and students, which should be purchased with the budget of each provincial office of education. For kindergartens and primary schools in which only few children have been vaccinated, 10% more test kits should be stocked to prepare for emergencies.
- Provincial offices of Education should also have mobile PCR testing teams to carry out the test swiftly by visiting schools in case of urgent necessity.

## **2 Setting Up Academic Plans and Promoting Active Educational Activities**

- Given the characteristics of the Omicron, the number of infected can skyrocket over a short period of time. Therefore, response measures should be more specified for different regions and schools, rather than having a one-size-fits-all plan across the country in order to respond more quickly and flexibly.
- In this regard, academic operation should be divided into four categories, which is as follows: 1) Normal education activities; 2) full-scale in-person schooling + limitation on extracurricular activities; 3) partial in-person schooling with student density limits; and 4) full-scale online schooling. These modes of operation can be decided by provincial offices of education or schools.
- Nevertheless, the decision to transition to full-scale online schooling in a region or school can be cautiously considered when schools develop their BCP (Business Continuity Plan) and standards should be set up beforehand in order to maintain in-person schooling as much as

possible along with strong COVID prevention measures.

- When drawing up a detailed mode of school operation, the following should be considered as key indicators for schools to make quick decisions: 1) the proportion of infected student should at 3% or more; or 2) the proportion of students not allowed to come to school (infected + quarantine) should be at 15% or more.
  - Having said that, if such indicators (e.g. 3% or 15%) are applied in an uniform manner, it's highly likely that they may fail to fully reflect reality on the ground, which may cause more confusion in schools. Therefore, such standards should only be used as a guideline so that each region and school can come up with their own standards by taking their own contexts into consideration.
- The Ministry of Education should be thoroughly prepared to ensure academic activities are carried out in the most stable fashion possible.
- First, provincial offices of education should secure alternative personnel who can complement the incumbent workforce to help with classroom instruction and administrative work in schools in case of labor shortage.
  - By making both online and in-person schooling available at the same time, learning management system servers are up-scaled greatly to accommodate heavy online traffic, and digital devices should also be secured to ensure that they can be supplied to students who do not have digital devices. Also, before the semester begins, digital devices are fully checked to see if they don't malfunction.
  - Moreover, schools should come up with their own BCP (Business Continuity Plan) as part of a contingency plan to deal with emergencies even in the case of a surge in the number of teachers confirmed with

## COVID-19.

- The Ministry of Education will strive to protect students' right to education and to uphold the value of learning continuity to minimize learning loss.
  - First, two-way, live-streaming online classes should be offered to students who cannot physically go to school, and schools should come up with concrete plans to provide online classes, as well as allow not only teachers, but also experts, students and parents to partake in school online class committee to fully reflect their voices.
  - Childcare services at kindergartens, primary and special schools are offered as business as usual, while even during hybrid mode of schooling and full-scale online schooling, schools must be open to accommodate those in need. Additionally, after-school programs should be operated in-person, online and hybrid manners in line with academic schedules, but they should also shift to online when full-scale online schooling is implemented.
  - Moreover, at the outset of the semester, all students' level of learning, psychological and emotional status are monitored and diagnosed, and the results are used to develop tailored programs.

### **【 Academic and COVID Response Plans for Higher Education Institutions 】**

- Higher education institutions should also strive to safeguard their students' right to health and education by effectively responding to the Omicron and strengthen COVID prevention measures to allow in-person schooling as much as possible.

#### **1 Development of Autonomous COVID Response System to Cope with the Omicron**

- To ward off COVID-19 from colleges, the Ministry of Education and colleges designated a period of intensive COVID monitoring (Feb. 14-Mar.

11) before and after the spring semester began to inspect college facilities.

- By utilizing the budget earmarked to promote innovation in junior colleges, ample amounts of self-COVID test kits and PPE are purchased in advance, and negative COVID test results of students living in school dormitory are confirmed.
  - Considering the difficulty related to wearing masks all the time, self-COVID test kits are assigned to arts and physical education classes and labs. Additionally, outsiders are strictly banned from accessing dormitories as a means of emphasizing measures to prevent infection.
  - If a confirmed case occurs in dormitory, the confirmed person is quickly transported to a local treatment center via a strong cooperation system established in advance between local governments and colleges.
- With the greater uncertainty caused by the recent Omicron surge, colleges are required to set up their own BCP (Business Continuity Plan) preemptively to respond to COVID-19 in their schools in a more phased and flexible manner.
- According to their own plans, colleges are required to shift to online mode of learning temporarily in the case of emergency, but continue to carry out their critical academic activities and research.

## **2 Operation of Academic Activities and Lectures**

- In-person lectures should continue as part of the overall academic operation, especially those require in-person contact, such as major lectures, lab activities and small-group activities.
- If in-person lectures are unworkable from the perspective of education and disease prevention, ways to make it happen partially should be considered as priority.

- College students should be informed before their semester begins how the lectures will be carried out (whether in-person or online), and when the mode of learning has to change during a semester, their voices should be heard before making the decision to increase predictability.
- Even in the case of online lectures, lecturers and students should exchange their feedback on a regular basis, and make use of the support offered by the online lecture management committee in each college to provide quality online courses.

### **3 Extracurricular Activities and Social and Emotional Support**

- Extra-curricular programs are created in the field of student learning communities, counseling (mentoring) and preparation for employment by using the budget assigned for college innovation or within colleges' own budgets
- On the condition that they strictly conform to social distancing measures of no more than six persons per gathering, autonomous student activities are encouraged to revive school community activities and holistic development of students.
- Moreover, psychological support is provided for students via student counseling centers to offer emotional support as a means of promoting their recovery of social skills and mental health.
- Deputy Prime Minister Yoo Eunhae said, "The characteristics of the Omicron should be taken into calculation when we draw up our plans for school operation, and after close consultation with relevant institutions, the Ministry of Education has come up with three measures to establish BCP (business continuity plan) with schools at the center, and a new school COVID testing system."
- She added, "The Ministry of Education will respond effectively to raise

its readiness by introducing testing systems such as rapid antigen test and mobile PCR tests, and prepare enough PPE to lower school infection rates as much as possible and to promote school initiative."

- Moreover, she highlighted, "We'll work hard to allow students of all school levels to physically go to school in the first semester by constantly monitoring student infection rates and how schools respond to the infection."

