



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**PROTOCOL ON THE WRITING OF THE 2020 NOVEMBER
EXAMINATIONS
IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE COVID-19 REQUIREMENTS**

Revised 2 NOVEMBER 2020

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DEFINITIONS

Confirmed COVID-19 case: When a staff member or learner tests positive for SARS-CoV-2 with or without symptoms.

Direct/Close contact: Staff or learner(s) who have been in contact with an individual with **confirmed** COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes and within 1 metre without a mask, face shield or face covering.

Casual/Distant contact: Staff or learner(s) who have been in contact with an individual with confirmed COVID-19 for a short period (15 minutes or less), and maintained physical distancing (more than 1 metre) with a confirmed case, and who was wearing a mask, face shield or face covering.

Contact time: The time that a disinfectant must be in contact with a surface or device to ensure that appropriate disinfection has occurred. For most disinfectants, the surface should remain wet for the required contact time. For SARS-CoV-2, it takes 20 seconds to dissolve the virus membrane.

Detergent: A synthetic cleansing agent that can emulsify and suspend oil. It contains surfactant or a mixture of surfactants with cleaning properties in dilute solutions to lower surface tension and aid in the removal of organic soil and oils, fats and greases. Detergents are effective against coronaviruses.

Disinfectants: Chemical compounds that inactivate (i.e. kill) pathogens and other microbes. Disinfectants are applied only to inanimate objects. All organic material and soil must be removed by a cleaning product before application of disinfectants. Some products combine a cleaner with a disinfectant.

Decontamination: All equipment and rooms that individuals with confirmed COVID-19 diagnoses have been in contact with, during the preceding three (3) days, should be identified for appropriate cleaning. Following a thorough wet cleaning, surfaces must be wiped, not sprayed, with disinfectants, in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The surfaces should remain wet for at least 20 seconds to dissolve the membrane of the virus.

Fogging (fumigation/misting): Dispersing a liquid chemical disinfectant to disinfect environmental surfaces in an enclosed space. Fogging is NOT recommended.

Isolation: A period during which someone who is confirmed to have COVID-19 is separated from healthy people. The period ends after 10 days of the onset of symptoms if symptomatic or from the date of testing if asymptomatic or from the date of clinical stability if hospitalised (end of oxygen treatment).

Quarantine: A period during which someone who has been exposed to a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19, is separated from healthy people and observed for the development of symptoms of COVID-19. This period is currently ten (10) days from the last date of exposure.

Suspected COVID-19: When a staff member or learner appears ill or displays symptoms consistent with COVID-19, based on the symptom screen/NICD case definition, but has either not been tested or is awaiting a SARS-CoV-2 test result.

1. Introduction

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated the need for an alternative approach to the general conduct, administration, and management of national examinations. It is imperative for officials entrusted with the responsibility of administering and managing the writing of examinations to ensure that the necessary precautions aimed at protecting both officials and candidates from contracting COVID-19 are observed at all examination centres.

This protocol must be read in conjunction with the most recent revised *Standard Operating Procedure for the containment and management of COVID-19 for schools and school communities*, issued by the Department of Basic Education. It is also assumed that in cases where the school is being used as an examination centre, the *Standard Operating Procedure for the containment and management of COVID-19 for schools and school communities* is being followed and therefore the contents of this protocol will emphasise certain requirements and also indicate the additional requirements that must be adhered to. In cases where an examination centre is not an existing operational school, it is incumbent on the chief invigilator at such a centre to ensure that the *Standard Operating Procedure for the containment and management of COVID-19 for schools and school communities* is strictly followed.

This protocol on the writing of the 2020 November examinations does not replace the *Regulations Pertaining to the Conduct, Administration and Management of the National Senior Certificate Examinations*, which is the primary legislation governing the management and administration of the NSC examinations.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this protocol is to ensure the safety of both candidates and officials from contracting the COVID-19 virus, and to encourage hygienically approved practices that would minimize the rate of infection during the writing of examinations. The need to maintain social distancing, to sanitize hands and to wear personal protective equipment, such as face masks, as a strategy instituted by the World Health Organization (WHO) to combat the spread of COVID-19 has a direct impact on the processes to be followed during the writing of examinations. This protocol aims at providing standardised procedures that are to be implemented as precautionary measures at all examination centres when managing the following processes relating to the writing of examinations:

- (a) Preparation of the examination centre
- (b) Preparation of the examination room
- (c) Admitting candidates into the examination room
- (d) Invigilation of the writing of the examinations
- (e) Handling of irregularities associated with the writing
- (f) Monitoring of the writing
- (g) Management of COVID-19 cases
- (h) Management of scribes and readers

3. Guiding Principles

The following set of guiding principles served as the basis for the development of this examination protocol and must guide the implementation of this examination protocol:

- (a) Maintaining the safety and well-being of learners, officials and educators is priority and this will guide all decisions and actions to be taken in the management of the examinations.
- (b) A nationally coordinated approach will be implemented in the management of the safety and protection of learners, officials and educators. Given the diversity of the South African environment and varying contextual factors, the DBE will provide the national directives, which must be adhered to in all examination centres.
- (c) This examination protocol must be implemented in conjunction with the rules and regulations pertaining to examinations.
- (d) The COVID-19 health and safety protocols will serve as the basis of this protocol developed for the management of examinations.
- (e) In the implementation of this protocol, fairness and equity must be observed, particularly with regard to the most vulnerable learners.
- (f) Any action that would compromise the integrity and credibility of the examinations must be avoided.
- (g) This protocol relating to examinations is aligned to the protocol followed by the school during the normal teaching and learning and it will include additional measures where necessary, given the specific requirements of public examinations.

4. Basic Safety and Health Requirements to be observed across all Examination Centres

The following are the basic health and safety requirements that must be observed at all examination centres and these cannot be compromised irrespective of the circumstances:

- 4.1 All candidates and invigilators must wear a face mask at all times. A face shield may be worn together with a face mask, but never on its own.
- 4.2 All examination rooms must be fully ventilated. All windows should be open.
- 4.3 All candidates and invigilators are to observe the one metre (1 m) social distancing protocol.
- 4.4 School halls are not limited to 50 candidates during the writing, provided that they adhere to the 1 m social distancing protocol and the number of invigilators complies with the 1:30 ratio.
- 4.5 All candidates and invigilators are expected to sanitize their hands at the entrance of each examination room, as well as before and after handling examination material. Sufficient quantities of hand sanitizers with at least a 70% alcohol base should be provided.
- 4.6 The wearing of surgical gloves by either invigilators or candidates is **NOT** recommended.
- 4.7 All officials and candidates arriving at an examination centre must be screened.
- 4.8 The screening of candidates must be completed 30 minutes before the commencement of the examination session.
- 4.9 Each examination centre should keep a register of candidates with co-morbidities.

5. Preparation of the Examination Centre

- 5.1 A COVID-19 screening team must be established for each examination centre.
- 5.2 A dedicated SMT member or a senior teacher, or an invigilator in the case of designated centres, must lead the screening team.
- 5.3 All the invigilators, candidates, monitors and any other examination official entering the examination centre must be screened before entering the examination centre (preferably at the main gate).
- 5.4 The screening team must ensure that invigilators, candidates and monitors complete the health-profile form (**Annexure A**) on entry to the examination centre, and this must be done on a daily basis.
- 5.5 An adequate number of examination rooms must be identified for candidate accommodation. The number of examination rooms at an examination venue must be based on the highest number of candidates sitting for the examinations at that venue and must be based on the COVID-19 protocol on social distancing. In addition to the examination room(s), an isolation room must be identified, preferably some distance away from the examination rooms.
- 5.6 Sufficient and appropriate furniture must be made available to accommodate the highest number of candidates writing at that venue.
- 5.7 The Grade 12 examination rooms must be cordoned off from the rest of the classrooms that may be used by the internal classes. (Schools may use demarcation tape to cordon off the examination rooms.)
- 5.8 The number of invigilators to be used, including the relief invigilators, must correlate with the number of examination rooms to be used per examination session.
- 5.9 A reserve list of invigilators must be available, to accommodate an invigilator that has to be isolated due to displaying COVID-19 related symptoms or testing positive.
- 5.10 Cleaning and disinfection of the identified examination rooms/halls must be done when the examination rooms/halls are being prepared for the examinations and before every examination session. Examination rooms/halls must be locked to avoid any unauthorised entry prior to examinations/sessions. Cleaning and disinfection can be carried out by suitably trained cleaning staff.
- 5.11 Decontamination is only required post the identification of a COVID-19 infection in that room.
- 5.12 It is imperative to remember that **all** ablution facilities are cleaned daily and that they are well equipped with consumables, such as soap, water, paper towels, etc.
- 5.13 An alternative venue close to the examination centre must be identified for writing purposes, just in case the examination centre has to be closed due to COVID-19 cases being identified at the centre.

6. Training of Invigilators

- 6.1 All invigilators must receive COVID-19 training as outlined in the revised DBE Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and this protocol.
- 6.2 Additional invigilators may be required if additional examination rooms are to be used and therefore these additional invigilators must be trained on the current protocols.

- 6.3 Inform invigilators that face masks and face coverings may be used to conceal unauthorized materials, such as notes or communication devices. Invigilators must monitor candidate behaviour closely during the examination. They should be alert to any activity suggesting that a candidate has concealed unauthorized materials in their face covering.

7. Preparation of the Examination Room

- 7.1 Disinfect and sanitize all surfaces, in all examination rooms daily, **before** each session.
- 7.2 Physical distancing of the candidates' furniture should be maintained at 1 metre (1 m).
- 7.3 Ensure adequate ventilation and lighting in the examination room.
- 7.4 Have compliant hand sanitizers at the entrance of each examination room.
- 7.5 A reserve supply of masks must be kept in the examination room, should candidates arrive without masks.
- 7.6 Adequate COVID-19 signage must be displayed in every examination room.
- 7.7 Strictly adhere to a ratio of one (1) invigilator to 30 candidates when a normal classroom is used as an examination room.
- 7.8 In the case of a hall being used as an examination venue, divide the space in accordance with the 1 m social distancing requirement and accommodate candidates accordingly. Remember that the number of candidates should not be more than 30 per invigilator.
- 7.9 Invigilators and candidates must always wear face masks.

8. Admitting Candidates into the Examination Room

- 8.1 Candidates must arrive at the examination centre at least one and a half hours before the start of the examination to allow for the screening processes, and candidates must be seated in the examination room at least 30 minutes prior to the commencement of the examination.
- 8.2 Candidates must sanitize their hands before admission into the examination room.
- 8.3 Face masks are to be worn at all times by all persons entering the examination room.
- 8.4 The seating plans must adhere to the 1 m social distancing protocol.
- 8.5 Avoid congestion at the venue entrance and exit by allowing a few candidates to enter at regular intervals, while maintaining social distancing. Where feasible, the arrival times of candidates should be staggered to prevent large numbers accumulating outside the venue. Place markers on the ground or barriers outside the examination venue to ensure the 1 metre social distancing and also place markers on the ground at the entrance to the examination room.
- 8.6 Implement a one-way system for walking within the examination room.
- 8.7 Allow candidates whose examination desks are furthest away from the entrance to enter the examination room first.

- 8.8 Candidates must enter the examination room one at a time at a distance of 1 m from each other and candidates must immediately move to their designated seats.
- 8.9 If more than one examination subject is written simultaneously in the same venue, candidates can be separated in the venue by subject cohort. This is to facilitate contact tracing if necessary.
- 8.10 The social distancing protocol must be maintained at all times, including when candidates present their identity documents (IDs) and admission letters before entering the examination room.
- 8.11 Candidates should be allowed to bring their own sanitizers into the examination room. The sanitizer bottles should not have any labels or have anything written on it and must always be visible to the invigilators. These must be placed either on the desk or on the floor.
- 8.12 A candidate who presents with COVID-19 symptoms, including a temperature reading of more than 38 °C, will not be allowed to proceed to the examination room. Make sure that the thermometer is in good working order. The temperature should be checked with another functional thermometer. It is advisable to have at least two functional thermometers at each screening point.
- 8.13 Candidates whose temperature is higher than the acceptable level (above 38 °C) will be isolated and re-screened every ten minutes for thirty minutes. Such candidates will only be allowed into an examination room if their temperature decreases to the acceptable level (below 38 °C) **and** he/she has answered "no" to the other six questions on the screening form, **within the first hour** of the examination session. The candidate is allowed entry into the examination room and must be compensated for the lost time.
- 8.14 A candidate whose temperature is consistently above 38 °C after the regular 10-minute checks in the first 30 minutes and/or answers "yes" to two or more of the questions on the screening questionnaire, will be taken to the isolation room at the centre for the candidate to sit for the examination. The examination may be conducted in the isolation room for candidates that present a temperature above 38 °C and deemed able to sit for the examination, or in an open well-defined and visible space such as a veranda, corridor/passage, provided it is isolated and has no access to other persons. The parent(s)/guardian(s) should be informed immediately that his/her son/daughter/ward has presented a temperature of above 38 °C and/or answered "yes" to two or more of the questions on the screening questionnaire and therefore will be writing the examination in an isolation room. The parent/guardian must also be directed to seek medical assistance from health practitioners (local health facility or private practitioner), which should be done after the examination session.
- 8.15 Adherence to social distancing and other standard precautions will be of utmost importance in the isolation room/area. Normal invigilation rules will apply in the isolation room and the social distancing can be extended beyond the 1 metre in the isolation room, depending on the number of candidates present. Invigilators need to be reassured that provided the social distancing rule, the wearing of a face mask and hand sanitization are strictly observed, their personal safety is not at risk. Invigilators could be provided with face shields in addition to the masks, where possible.

- 8.16 These candidates must not socialize or have contact with other candidates before or after the examination. They should remain in the isolation room/area until other candidates have dispersed, and should ideally be accompanied home or other arrangements be made to ensure that no contact with other candidates occurs. Testing for COVID-19 is also recommended, and will be determined by the treating health practitioner.
- 8.17 Should a candidate refuse to be screened, he/she will not be allowed entry into the examination centre.
- 8.18 Candidates will be requested to remove their face masks for identification purposes before being admitted into the examination room.
- 8.19 A candidate that has **recently** tested positive for COVID-19 will not be allowed to write the examination before the ten days of isolation have been completed.

9. Invigilation

- 9.1 All invigilators are to sanitize their hands prior to and after handling question paper packs and individual question papers.
- 9.2 An invigilator must ensure that he/she personally distributes question papers to candidates, and not request candidates to pass question papers from one to another.
- 9.3 Candidates must report to the invigilator if he/she feels ill during the examination session.
- 9.4 Invigilators must also report to the chief invigilator if they are not feeling well.
- 9.5 Candidates and all staff must report to the chief invigilator if they become ill within 48 hours to facilitate contact-tracing if necessary.
- 9.6 There is to be NO sharing of writing materials/instruments among candidates.
- 9.7 Should a candidate require a bathroom break, she/he must be accompanied by a same-gender invigilator. On their return from the bathroom, both the candidate and the invigilator must sanitize their hands.
- 9.8 Invigilators must check that candidates are not carrying crib notes in/on their face masks.
- 9.9 Disposable cups must be provided for candidates who may need to drink water during writing.
- 9.10 A candidate may be allowed to bring along his/her own water bottle, provided it has no labels and no writing, and is visible to the invigilators and monitors. In such a case, the water bottles must be placed on the floor.
- 9.11 Invigilators are to remind candidates that if they leave anything behind after the examination (such as a pencil case), these items may be thrown away or destroyed for hygiene reasons.

10. The Handling of Irregularities

- 10.1 *A candidate found with crib notes/unauthorised material.* The invigilator must confiscate the crib notes/unauthorised material. The invigilator must sanitize his/her hands before and after handling the crib notes/unauthorised material. The crib notes/unauthorised material must be attached to the answer script, if possible. A copy must be safely retained as evidence. Exercise caution and refrain from spraying sanitizer on notes/answer scripts, to avoid tampering with evidence.

- 10.2 *A candidate found with a cellphone during writing:* The invigilator must confiscate the cellphone. The cellphone must be sanitized by the candidate before it is handled by the invigilator and retained in a plastic bag/envelope for safekeeping as evidence. The invigilator must sanitize his/her hands before and after handling the cellphone.

11. Monitoring

- 11.1 Monitors should arrive at least **one and a half hours** before the start of the examination.
- 11.2 All monitors are to be screened before entering an examination centre. No monitor will be allowed into the examination centre without being screened. Should a monitor refuse to be screened, he/she will not be allowed access into the examination centre.
- 11.3 The screening of the monitors is additional to providing answers to the seven COVID-19 protocol questions. Should a monitor answer "yes" to any one or more of the seven questions, the monitor will not be allowed to fulfil his/her duty at the examination centre.
- 11.4 Monitors whose temperatures are high (above 38 °C) will be isolated and re-screened every ten minutes. Should the temperature test normal (below 38 °C) on re-screening **and** the monitor's responses to the COVID-19 protocol questions are fine, the monitor will then be allowed access into the examination centre. If the temperature of the monitor does not return to normal, the monitor should not be allowed into the examination centre.
- 11.5 All monitors are to sanitize their hands before entering an examination room and during the execution of their duties in an examination room, e.g. when checking the IDs and admission letters of candidates.
- 11.6 Monitors without face masks will not be granted access into an examination room.
- 11.7 All monitors must adhere to the social distancing protocol of 1 m during monitoring.
- 11.8 Monitoring instruments are to be completed electronically, where possible, and e-mailed to the responsible PED official.
- 11.9 Monitors are permitted to bring their own sanitizers into an examination room.

12. Management of COVID-19 Cases

- 12.1 Section 16, on page 36 of the *Revised Standard Operating Procedure for the containment and management of COVID-19 for schools and school communities*, entitled: *Steps to be followed to manage COVID-19 in schools*, must be strictly applied in cases where candidates or examination officials are tested positive for COVID-19 or display symptoms of COVID-19.
- 12.2 Only the head of department (HOD) or the delegated official (e.g. District Director), on the advice of the Department of Health, can authorize the closure of a classroom/examination room or section of a school.
- 12.3 The district office should ensure that the examination centre where confirmed case(s) of COVID-19 infections were identified is supported and assisted in conducting the decontamination of the specific examination room(s) or section of the school overnight or as soon as practically possible to ensure that the conduct of the examination is not negatively impacted.

- 12.4 Candidates who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and had to be in self-isolation for the period of ten days must be marked as '999' on the attendance register: (Absent with a valid reason).
- 12.5 Candidates who missed the writing of certain papers due to testing positive for COVID-19 should automatically be registered for the subjects that they have missed, to write during the May/June 2021 examinations.
- 12.6 Candidates who have tested positive for COVID-19, and have recovered, based on the ten days in isolation, may continue with the writing of the remaining subjects on the timetable. However, candidates who decide not to continue with the writing of the remaining subjects should be accommodated in the May/June 2021 examinations. It is not necessary for a candidate who had tested positive for COVID-19 to conduct a second test to produce a negative result. If they have completed the 10 days of isolation and are without symptoms, they must be allowed to write the examination. However, the parent/guardian must provide a written undertaking/endorsement that the candidate was subjected to ten days in isolation indicating the commencement date which is based on the start of the symptoms, if symptomatic, or from the date of the test, if asymptomatic, or ten days from clinical stability (end of oxygen treatment) if hospitalised.
- 12.7 Candidates who have been put in quarantine may only commence writing their examinations after completing their 10-day quarantine period, which is counted from the date of last exposure to an infected person.
- 12.8 If a candidate or staff member notifies the examination centre that they became ill within 48 hours after the examination with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, the designated COVID-19-point person/compliance officer should ensure that the register is sourced from the administrator. Evaluation of the contact risk to all students sharing the examination room must be conducted. Pay attention to those who sat in direct proximity to the individual who reported illness, and to the duration that all candidates were in the examination room. The decision as to who is a close contact should be made using the definition herein, and in consultation with local health officials and appropriate contact-tracing actions should be taken.

13. Management of Accommodation Providers

- 13.1 Accommodation providers (e.g. scribes and readers) should be appointed centrally by the provincial office and deployed to specific centres by request.
- 13.2 The examination room where the services of a scribe or reader are needed must be cleaned and surfaces should be sanitized before every sitting in the same way as the other examination rooms.
- 13.3 All scribes and readers should always wear clear face shields and face masks. The wearing of face shields will ensure that candidates are able to hear and see when the scribes/readers are speaking.
- 13.4 No scribe or reader should be allowed into the examination centre without a face shield.
- 13.5 All scribes and readers are to be screened before entering an examination room. No scribe/reader will be allowed into the examination room without being screened. Should a scribe/reader refuse to be screened, he/she will not be allowed access into the examination room.

- 13.6 The screening of the scribes/readers is additional to providing answers to the seven COVID-19 protocol questions. Should a scribe/monitor answer "yes" to any one or more of the seven COVID-19 protocol questions, the scribe/reader will not be allowed access into the examination room.
- 13.7 Scribes/Readers whose temperatures are high (above 38 °C) will be isolated and rescreened every ten minutes for thirty minutes, ideally with another thermometer. Should the temperature test normal (below 38 °C) on re-screening **and** the scribe's/reader's respond with a "No" to the COVID-19 protocol questions, the scribe/reader will then be allowed access into the examination room.
- 13.8 The chief invigilator should ensure that there is an invigilator at each of the examination rooms where either the scribe or reader has been assigned to provide their services to the candidates. The invigilator must comply with all the protocols as outlined in paragraph 8.

14. Conclusion

This protocol on the writing of the examination amid the COVID-19 pandemic is not a replacement of the policy document and regulations pertaining to the conduct, administration and management of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations. These protocols deal specifically with the challenges raised by the COVID-19 environment. Thus, the standard requirements as per the regulations pertaining to the conduct, administration and management of the National Senior Certificate examinations still apply, except for those clauses directly affected by the need to comply with international COVID-19 protocols. Examination officials and other members of staff involved in the administration of examinations should ensure that procedures as contained in this protocol are adhered to during the writing of examinations in an attempt to minimize the proliferation of COVID-19 infections.

ANNEXURE A



Basic Education
Health
Social Development

COVID-19

Online Resource & News Portal
SAcoronavirus.co.za



health

Department
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



| Checklist for Screening | Yes/No |
|--|--------|
| Record temperature using infrared thermometer | |
| Screening questions | |
| Do you have a high temperature? | |
| Do you have a cough? | |
| Do you have a sore throat? | |
| Do you have difficulty breathing (shortness of breath)? | |
| Can you taste food and drinks normally? | |
| Can you smell normally? | |
| Have you had close contact with someone suspected to have COVID-19 or has been diagnosed positively with COVID-19? | |