

## A Review of Government Notifications on COVID Protocols and Child Entitlements

**States covered:** Bihar, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Assam and Government of India (GOI)

### Main Findings from Bihar

**Mid-day Meals:** In the absence of mid-day meals, during the lockdown period Bihar Government has provided food grains to the students studying in Govt. or Govt. aided schools from May 2020 to September 2021 (as per the documents received). Each student studying in Class 1 to 5 will receive 100gm per day, and Class 6 to 8 will receive 150gms per day.

In addition, there is a cash transfer done by the mid-day meal committee called Parivartan shulk in order to cover the expense of other food items that are not covered in grains. This amount is Rs. 4.48 per student per day for Class 1 to 5 and Rs. 6.71 per student per day for Class 6 to 8. This amount was changed to Rs. 4.97 per student per day for Class 1 to 5 and Rs. 7.45 per student per day for Class 6 to 8 in April 2020. This bank transfer has been done directly through DBT (Direct Beneficiary Transfer) after the distribution of food grains to the student beneficiaries parent/guardian. The parent/guardian were asked to collect the grain directly from the school. Door to door delivery was ensured for students with Acute encephalitis syndrome (AES).

Apart from this, some Voluntary organizations have also donated food grains for the distribution.

*Observations:* The purpose of cash transfer related to student's development is not clearly mentioned in any of the circulars, except for the fact that it was related to food items other than grains. If it is to be assumed that it is for the other food items that the students generally get in their mid-day meals, milk or eggs, then the problems of cash transfers apply to this situation, where it cannot be ensured that the household will utilise the cash amount for the specific purpose of buying eggs and milk for the child. This is especially relevant for the most marginalised households who are anyway facing acute economic distress because of the pandemic. Studies based on cash transfers have shown that it has a tendency to reproduce exiting patriarchal practices related to food distribution and consumption within the household<sup>1</sup> (Fledderjohann, J. et.al, 2014). Cash transfers for food especially for a girl child, does not ensure that she would be the direct beneficiary of the transfer, rather in most cases it was observed that due to the norms of 'male members eating first and getting more nutritious food' the girls were often left behind.

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<sup>1</sup>Jasmine Fledderjohann, Sutapa Agrawal, Sukumar Vellakkal, Sanjay Basu, Oona Campbell, Pat Doyle, Shah Ebrahim, David Stuckler (2014) ' Do Girls Have a Nutritional Disadvantage Compared with Boys? Statistical Models of Breastfeeding and Food Consumption Inequalities among Indian Siblings' PLoS One. 2014; 9(9): e107172.  
doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0107172  
PMCID:PMC4167551

**Child Entitlements:** School books were distributed for Classes 1 to 8. The CRC and BRC were responsible for setting up the book stalls. The stalls were set up at the village level.

*Observation:* It was good to note that Bihar has moved away from DBT for books to setting up of stalls at the village level. But it is not known if this move was valid only for the pandemic period, or the transition is applicable to non-pandemic years also.

**Covid preventive measures:** The students were given washable cloth masks before the reopening of schools. Schools also organised vaccination drives, where eligible members (18 years and above) were encouraged to take the vaccine.

**Measures for safe school re-opening:** Sanitization of all schools were undertaken by the state. 50 % attendance of students was ensured on alternate days in order to avoid over-crowding of schools. Handwashing facilities, digital thermometer and cleanliness needs to be ensured. The availability of a doctor should be ensured. Redefining the leave policy. - If there are students demanding leave due to fever then it should be flexible, the calendars should be planned according to exam dates. Mandatory wearing of mask, not exchanging each other's mask, instruction should be given to not touch face. Street vendors should not be allowed inside the school premises to sell their products, students should be asked to bring food from home. Proper evacuation of students going out - separate buses, proper sanitization, thermal screening, no one shall be allowed without mask, 40-70 % strength in bus.

**Addressing learning loss:** A three-month bridge course was announced before re-opening of schools in 2021. A re-enrolment of all students was undertaken before school re-opening to ensure that all enrolled students participated in the bridge course.

*Observations:* The learning loss for students during the school closure has been immense and compounding. The loss is not just in terms of grade level competencies, but also related to forgetting previously learnt concepts. Therefore, addressing learning loss, needs more time and effort and cannot be covered in a three-month bridge course. It should also be noted that since students have varied competencies, their learning loss is also not the same and therefore calibrated measures to assess learning loss need to be undertaken by the state. In this process, it becomes critical to train teachers in assessing loss and executing the bridging of losses through their classroom processes.

**Others:** Restructuring of the School Education Committee in the Schools, where the restructuring of the committee has been kept on hold due to COVID situation and the orders have been given to continue the functioning of the existing committee. Reconstructing the newly created Schools which don't have proper building, an order was issued to rebuild the schools that were not built properly. Lastly, there was also an approval and grant release letter regarding the girl child promotion for Rs. 40 crores.

*Observations:* There was no mention of how the students and teachers access the online education, the process and challenges faced. It was unclear how the students were accessing these services, considering the digital divide which strongly intersects with the social and economic divide in the country.

## **Main Findings from Uttar Pradesh (UP)**

**Mid-day Meals:** There is no notification related to the Mid-day meal scheme.

**Child Entitlements:** The UP Government has given uniforms and shoes to students studying in Class 1 to 8 in the month of April, 2020.

**Other:** The notifications have mentioned about postponing the exams till May 2021 in April 2021. School fees have been collected from the students as the online classes were running, and the families in distress or facing difficulties were allowed to pay the fees in instalments, only tuition fees was collected, and therefore fees for computer classes, libraries, annual function and so on were not collected.

**Online learning** - WhatsApp groups were made to establish e learning platforms for students and teachers.

*Observations:* No mention of MDM. There was no mention of how the students and teachers access the online education, the process and challenges faced. It was unclear how the students were accessing these services, considering the digital divide which strongly intersects with the social and economic divide in the country. No mention of measures for safe school re-opening and bridging of learning loss.

## **Main Findings from Assam**

**Mid-Day Meals:** An order issued on 28-12-2020 mentioned that, for elementary classes, mid-day meals are to be provided. In the same order, it is mentioned that the Head of the Institution will ensure that the cook gets a COVID test before cooking.

**Child Entitlements:** Missing

**Online Learning:** For Higher Educational Institutions, formal online classes were encouraged. A notification mentions that online education must be made available from pre-primary level to university level, including for hostels and coaching institutions.

**COVID protocols pertaining to educational institutions:** There was a distinction made between districts that have touched a 100 mark in terms of COVID cases and other that have not. In districts that have touched the 100-mark, 50% attendance in educational institutions was to be followed, no residential hostels were allowed to function, female teaching and non-teaching staff who were either pregnant or with children below the age of 5 were exempt from attending schools and educational institutions. Multiple strategies were used as protocols, which include classes on alternate days, attendance is not made compulsory but on parental consent, residential hostels will be closed, etc. Under General Guidelines, Covid Protocols like Social Distancing, Sanitization of institutions, early response to detection of COVID cases were mentioned.

**Others:** A few orders issued at specific points of time wherein COVID cases were high in the state of Assam state measures pertaining to night curfews, containment zones, closure of educational institutions, prohibition of inter district movement, functioning of offices, wearing masks, prohibition of public gatherings, etc.

*Observations:* The state of Assam issued multiple notifications with detailed COVID related protocols, even for educational institutions. However, any discussion on child entitlements like the mid-day meals programme, textbooks, etc. is missing. There is no heed given to challenges like loss of learning, access to online education, teacher training and so on.

### **Main Findings from the Government of India**

**Mid-Day Meals:** There is emphasis on cooks being tested before they engage with any kind of cooking activity. Cooks are meant to follow all covid protocols. Kitchens are to be sanitized and children are supposed to follow social distancing while receiving their meals.

**Child Entitlements:** Under SOP/Guidelines for Health and Safety Protocols for Re-opening of Schools and Learning with Physical Social Distancing, it is mentioned that prescribed textbooks must be made available to the students before schools reopen.

**Online Learning:** Online education is thoroughly encouraged. There is emphasis on coordination between teachers, parents and students when it comes to online education. It is suggested that parents play an active role in the education of their children.

**COVID Protocols pertaining to educational institutions:** All covid protocols are to be followed by schools and all educational institutions, be it social distancing, wearing masks, sanitization, etc.

**Others:** There is recognition and acknowledgement that children would be going through huge amount of stress during the pandemic, be it in terms of schools opening and shutting, irregularity of classes or transition between online and offline means of education. Therefore, there is emphasis on alternate academic calendar and alternate means of teaching, monitoring and assessment wherein teachers are encouraged to adopt diverse methods of teaching and monitor children individually and consider each of their experiences, especially of the pandemic and its uncertainties, as different for every child.

*Observations:* It is important to note that documents from the Government of India are suggestive in nature and not prescriptive. All the documents are either guidelines or in the form of SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures). There is clearly no discussion around child entitlements. With the mid-day meals, there is emphasis on COVID protocols but no mention of what and how children must be provided with. As part of a guidelines document, textbooks must be made available to the students before schools reopen but nothing further on this matter is discussed nor prescribed. Some guidelines emphasize on alternate academic calendars and alternate means of teaching, monitoring and assessment. Challenges like loss of learning, access to online education, teacher training, etc. and the means to address them were not discussed at all.