

## Correspondence

# COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean: what is known about the status of school reopening?

Since December 2019, the world has been facing a rapid increase in cases and deaths from the new coronavirus (COVID-19), forcing a response from countries all over the world to stop its transmission. Thus, at the beginning of April, 172 nations closed their schools, affecting >84.8% (~1484 million) of students enrolled worldwide,<sup>1</sup> aiming to reduce the exposure to the virus, a social measure previously used to control the H1N1 influenza pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to assess the impact of schools closures on the incidence and mortality from COVID-19, given that it is not easy to carry out experimental studies, there is no scientific support confirms its effectiveness.<sup>3</sup> However, during the influenza outbreaks, this strategy turned out to be a potentially useful intervention, despite not being able to determine the optimal moment to start and end this strategy, because of the concomitant use of other measures during the influenza outbreak;<sup>4</sup> however, in mathematical models, where the school closure was considered as an isolated measure, a reduction between 2 and 4% of the total deaths was calculated during the virus outbreak.<sup>5</sup>

The current state of schools reopening in Latin America and the Caribbean is presented below, since it is a complex problem difficult to consider in each country, as it could generate new cases and contribute to the virus transmission, given the lack of social distancing between students and teachers.

On 20 September 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization registered the state of schools reopening in 39 Latin America and the Caribbean countries (Table 1),<sup>6</sup> reporting that 12.82% allowed physical return to school full time and 28.21% permitted only a partial reopening. On the other hand, it was found that 54.84% of the countries considered a physical return to school within 2020, and 28.21% did not exclude such a possibility.

At the same time, less than half (47.37%) of Caribbean countries keep their schools closed, as opposed to 70% of Latin American countries. Since the majority of these schools belong to low- and middle-income countries, the provision of safe environments for the schools reopening is a challenge.<sup>7</sup> So a partial reopening would be a viable proposal, as it concentrates fewer people, facilitating physical distancing; on the other hand, we emphasize the proposal to carry out a hybrid approach in education, enabling a physical return during the partial reopening for students with limited resources for virtual access to classes, and live transmission for those who have the possibility of studying from home.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that there are no simple answers to decide when to reopen schools, since a sustained closure is not feasible in low- and middle-income countries, we agreed to seek solutions, learn from lessons and change priorities in countries, it will help to confront nations to cope with the pandemic,<sup>9</sup> so it is the responsibility of nations to consider strategies for the safe reopening of schools.

**Table 1** Current state of schools reopening in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to UNESCO

<i>Country</i>	<i>School closures and reopening by country</i>	
	<i>The current state of schools functioning</i>	<i>Date of return or possible return to face-to-face classes</i>
North America		
México	Closed	September
Central America		
Costa Rica	Closed	2021
El Salvador	Closed	2021
Guatemala	Closed	No definitive date
Honduras	Closed	No definitive date
Panamá	Closed	No definitive date
Belice	Closed	September
Nicaragua <sup>a</sup>	Open	—
South America		
Bolivia <sup>b</sup>	Closed	2021
Paraguay	Closed	2021
Perú	Closed	2021
Venezuela	Closed	2021
Ecuador	Closed	No definitive date
Guyana	Closed	No definitive date
Surinam	Closed	No definitive date
Argentina	Partial reopening	August
Brasil	Partial reopening	August
Colombia	Partial reopening	August
Chile	Partial reopening	July
Uruguay	Open	June
The Caribbean		
Aruba	Closed	No definitive date
Barbados	Closed	No definitive date
Curazao	Closed	No definitive date
Islas Caimán	Closed	No definitive date
República Dominicana	Closed	No definitive date
Bahamas	Closed	October
Jamaica	Closed	October
Islas Vírgenes Británicas	Closed	September
Montserrat	Closed	September
San Vicente y Las Granadinas	Partial reopening	September
Antigua y Barbuda	Partial reopening	September
Cuba	Partial reopening	September
Granada	Partial reopening	September
Santa Lucía	Partial reopening	September
Trinidad y Tobago	Partial reopening	August
Haití	Partial reopening	August
Dominica	Open	September
San Cristóbal y Nieves	Open	September
Anguila	Open	May

Updated 20 September 2020.

<sup>a</sup>The only country in Latin America that kept schools open.<sup>b</sup>The only country in Latin America with a suspended school year.

## Authors' Contributions

DFG conceived the study. All authors drafted the manuscript, critically reviewed and approved the final manuscript. All authors assume responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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## Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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