

Ebola-hit Sierra Leone's schools to reopen on March 30

February 4 2015

Sierra Leone said on Wednesday it would reopen the country's schools on March 30, after a seven-month shutdown to limit the spread of the Ebola virus.

Classrooms have been empty since the government announced a state of emergency in July in response to an outbreak which has killed almost 9,000 people in the region, more than 3,000 of them in Sierra Leone.

President Ernest Bai Koroma's office said he had granted permission for work to start on "water and sanitation issues, Ebola screenings and psychosocial support", ahead of the reopening.

"Thermometers will be made available to all schools to deal with any sudden attack before referral to a holding centre," education minister Minkailu Bah was quoted as saying.

"Isolation centres will be set up in each school and all primary school pupils will be dewormed."

The announcement clarifies a commitment made by the government in January to have all schools open by the end of March.

Sierra Leone is one of three west African countries hit by the deadliest Ebola outbreak on record, together with Guinea and Liberia.

The rate of new infections has slowed significantly in recent weeks,

paving the way for a gradual return to normal.

More than a third of Sierra Leone's population of six million are aged between three and 17, although in reality the secondary school attendance rate is less than 40 percent for both boys and girls.

Census delayed

There was a mixed reaction to Sierra Leone's announcement in the capital Freetown, where private radio station African Young Voices was deluged with critical calls.

"The decision will be a recipe for danger and it would have been better for the authorities to wait a few more months before making the reopening," one caller said.

But another listener welcomed "a thoughtful decision for all" that would halt a rise in teenage pregnancy seen since schools closed and show the war against Ebola was being won.

UNICEF spokesman Christophe Boulierac told reporters in Geneva on Tuesday around 500,000 children—around a quarter of the total roll—had returned to school in Guinea since classrooms reopened on January 19.

Liberia announced last week that its schools would reopen on February 16, two weeks later than the date originally envisaged.

In a second announcement on Wednesday, Sierra Leone's presidency said it was delaying a population census planned for April until December because of the crisis.

Results of the survey—already delayed once due to the crisis—take 12

months to compile in a country where the majority live in remote tribal chiefdoms with poor infrastructure.

"The postponement will not compromise the census data quality. It will however affect the timing of the release of the census results, and the final results initially expected in December 2015 will only be available by December 2016," the statement said.

© 2015 AFP

Citation: Ebola-hit Sierra Leone's schools to reopen on March 30 (2015, February 4) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-02-ebola-hit-sierra-leone-schools-reopen.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.