



## Promoting Health for All People in Malawi

2<sup>nd</sup> January 2023

### THE CHOLERA FIGHT IN VIEW OF SCHOOLS OPENING

Malawi Health Equity Network (MHEN) would like to comment to two statements that were released by Ministry of Education (MoE) on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 and by the Presidential Taskforce on COVID-19 and Cholera (PTCC) on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2023. We appreciate the releases of the statements as schools are opening on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2023, and that there is need for guidance from a higher level. We have some pieces of advice and recommendations on the two statements.

Firstly, we commend the MoE for providing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to equip schools with cholera information and skills on prevention of further spreading of the disease. We agree with all the information given in the statement. Further to that we recommend that the following be considered to be incorporated:

- Schools should re-introduce hand-washing facilities with soap. They can use the same buckets that were procurement when COVID-19 was at its peaks, or procure new ones.
- School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) should be spelt out that they should take part in enforcement of the SoPs for compliance.
- In addition to rushing to health facility with suspected cholera patients, equip the schools with first aid skills especially on how to make Oral Rehydration Solution (half a teaspoon of salt mixed with six teaspoons of sugar in one litre of safe or boiled water). Most people who have died of cholera either at home or upon arrival at health facilities, has been due to delayed rehydration, hence the importance of first aid.
- For now selling of food in schools should indeed remain prohibited, but in the long run there should also be plans in collaboration with Ministry of Health and Local Authorities to register and orient some of the food vendors on best ways of food preparation and handling. Such oriented vendors should be certified and be asked to display their certificates when selling the food in school premises. School learners will need to be sensitized to buy food from only vendors displaying their certificates as proof that they registered by the SMCs and oriented by MoH

Secondly, we applaud the PTCC for further guiding the nation on schools opening. The following are our observations and recommendations:

- It is very true that the situation is very bad in our cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe, and that poor management of children, especially at schools, can exacerbate the cholera spreading.
- In view of the SOPs from the MoE, that came almost concurrently with the PTCC intervention, the delayed opening of schools in the cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe should be revisited. The schools should be made to follow and implement the MoE SoPs with close monitoring by SMCs, PTAs and MoE officials. The Health Education sessions that will be made at schools' assemblies can be a good source of information and use the children as one of effective vehicles to reach households with information on cholera. Further to that, the children could be safer at schools rather letting them spend most hours of the day playing in their residential areas with limited confinements.



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- Cholera should be provided with more resources for monitoring and supervision in both schools and homes by Community Healthcare Workers such as Health Surveillance Assistants (HASs), Community Development Assistants (CDAs) and other officials to ascertain there is compliance to preventive measures, there are toilets/pit latrines in good state among others.
- Water should keep running in taps at the schools, or there must be hand-washing facilities as we have pointed out on the MoE SoPs above.
- The public should be prevented from using school toilets.
- City and district councils should be asked to manage waste well, including disinfecting dump sites, markets as done by Blantyre, and streets.

MHEN is an independent, non-profit making alliance of over ninety Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the health sector interested in promoting equitable access to quality, affordable and responsive health care services in Malawi. It achieves this through influencing policy formulation, review, and practice. MHEN was formed in the year 2000. It uses strategies which include lobby and evidence-based advocacy, research, civic education and information sharing. Its vision is “*All people in Malawi have access to equitable, quality, affordable and responsive essential health care services*” while its mission is “*Advocating and lobbying for the health systems that promote the delivery of equitable and quality health care services by influencing policy and practice through research, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation.*”

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