

COVID-19 Transitioning – Standards and Guidance for Examinations¹

The following standards are issued under the Public Health Act Chapter 465 of the Laws of Malta and require strict adherence.

These standards have been formulated to ensure compliance to the requirements of social distancing, to enhance hygienic practices and to minimise COVID-19 infection risks during the examination process.

In COVID-19 transitioning, examiners, invigilators and the general public (namely exam candidates) must work together to adapt and promote safe practices and prevent the transmission of COVID-19 during the examination process, consistent with advice from public health authorities and to ensure that premises are ready for the social distancing and correct hygiene measures that are critical to the success of the transition.

Examiners, invigilators and the general public (namely exam candidates) must prepare for the possibility that there are/will be cases of COVID-19 in the community and therefore also during an examination and be ready to respond immediately, appropriately, effectively and efficiently, and consistent with specific recommendations from public health authorities.

An examination is an organised event. Organised events are regulated by Legal Notice 325 of 2020: PUBLIC HEALTH ACT (CAP. 465) Organised Public Mass Events (Amendment) Regulations, 2020. Examinations organisers must ensure that:

- a. The number of persons that can be accommodated in each examination venue² must not exceed a total of one hundred (100) individuals (including exam candidates, invigilators, persons supporting individual candidates, any other personnel) Examination venues are to be provided with adequate ventilation (as appropriate)
- b. Examination venues have multiple entry and exit facilities to the outside (i.e. exam venues are not in a consecutive configuration such that to access one exam venue a person needs to move through another exam venue). It is recommended that examination venue planning adopts the praxis of selecting and conducting examinations in multiple smaller venues as much as possible rather than larger facilities as a tenet of best practice.
- c. Crowds are not allowed to congregate outside the examination venues. Organisers are to take all precautions (assisted by the appropriate enforcement agencies) to ensure that

¹ This Standards and Guidance document is principally aimed at addressing the organisation and conduction of examinations in which candidates originate from different educational and/or non-educational settings and facilities (such as MATSEC and 'A' level examinations). While most of the principles included can also apply for examinations carried out for students originating from the same school (such as in end-of-year exams), the definition of exam venue may not need to apply as long as examinations are organised within the same class or in the company of the same 'school bubble' established during their regular scholastic class setting.

² For the purpose of these Standards, an exam venue is construed to mean an indoor space that can be used to accommodate exam candidates during an exam. It is important that exam venues have multiple entry and exit facilities and that different groups of candidates are directed to enter and exit these venues from different points to avoid and control large number of persons congregating at the same site.



crowd management measures are observed at all times by the members of the public waiting outside the examination venue and to inform enforcement.

Understanding how COVID-19 spreads & the implications

Current research suggests that the SARS CoV-2 virus (the virus that causes COVID-19) is transmitted from person to person:

- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks loudly.
- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 2 metres).

There is also a possibility that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the COVID-19 virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, and eyes.

Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some people develop more serious complications and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness increases with age, for people with weakened immune systems and people with conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and lung disease.

Standards to be observed by invigilators, other members of staff and examination candidates

- a) exercise the right of refusal of entry onto the premises of exam candidates if they are visibly unwell or have uncertified respiratory symptoms.
- b) subject exam candidates to temperature checks at the entrance for the presence of fever - persons with a temperature of 37.2° Celsius or higher will be denied entrance.
- c) provide adequate and easily accessible hand sanitisers with an appropriate 70% alcohol hand-rub at the entrance to the examination venue, the examination room and other common areas and ensure that all persons sanitise their hands prior to entrance.
- d) regulate entrance into and exit from the premises adopting crowd management techniques as necessary (see Entrance and Exit Procedures below).
- e) keep detailed information on the persons present in each examination venue (date and time) including a map of the sitting positions of the exam candidates
- f) invigilators, other members of staff and exam candidates are to wear face masks (covering mouth, nose and chin) for the whole duration of the examination
- g) the number of invigilators needs to be kept to the minimum possible.
- h) all candidates should wait outside the venue until it is time to enter the examination hall. There should not be an indoor waiting area, if possible. Ensure management of waiting areas to ensure social distancing.
- i) ensure that persons maintain social distancing of at least two (2) meters from other individuals at all times. Indicate with visible markings outside and inside the premises two (2) metre distances that persons shall respect whilst queuing, including queuing for the rest rooms.
- j) during written examinations ensure that exam candidates are seated on desks and chairs that are at least two (2) metres apart (not more than one person sitting within 4m² of floor space).
- k) staff are to sanitise their hands before and after handling examination papers.



- l) affix visible signage at the entrance of the premises indicating the maximum capacity that the premises can hold at any one time.
- m) before the first session and between one exam session and another, all common areas are to be cleaned and disinfected thoroughly. These include the exam room as well as bathrooms and any public spaces used by the candidates.
- n) all “high-touch” surfaces, including but not limited to desktops, chairs, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, etc, need to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before the first session and between sessions.
- o) It must be ensured that there is adequate ventilation of the premises at all times. Further guidance on use of air conditioners and ventilation systems can be obtained from https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/health-promotion/covid-19/Documents/mitigation-conditions-and-guidances/Guidance_Air-conditioning-and-ventilation-systems_23Jun20.pdf
- p) exams should be scheduled with sufficient time between each session to allow for cleaning and disinfection of the areas and items mentioned in (i) and (j) above between one session and another.
- q) keep records of the contact information (name and a phone number) of the exam candidates, invigilators and other members of staff and the date and time when they were on the premises for up to 28 days. This information will be used if contact tracing will be required.
- r) Alternative and appropriate examination arrangements need to be devised and implemented for students requiring special attention such as those that are certified by hospital consultant paediatricians as requiring ‘shielding’ as well as students who will not be able to attend an examination venue because they are in mandatory quarantine (either as a positive COVID19 case or as a close contact).



Materials

1. Examination papers:
 - Staff should have disinfectant (liquid or wipes) readily available to clean the external surface of the boxes, paper bags and shrink wrap (as applicable) before handling them.
 - Staff should sanitize their hands with sanitizing gel or liquid once they have finished handling the examination papers, initially upon handing them out and at the end of the session on collecting them from the candidates
2. Stationery - Candidates are to bring their own pens, pencils, and any other stationery or personal equipment that may be required for the examination.
3. Candidates can bring their own sanitizing gel into the examination room provided that they follow the “water bottles rules” (transparent container, transparent gel or liquid, no labels etc.).

Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs)

- Invigilators should wear face masks (covering mouth, nose and chin) for the whole duration of the examination as well as during any necessary work periods before and after the examination
- Bins should be provided so that any PPEs can be disposed of appropriately.

Entrance and Exit Procedures

- Since the procedures to enter the examination room may take some time, it is advised to ask candidates to start to enter the venue earlier and in a staggered manner to ensure that all procedures are in place in good time prior to the start of the examination.
- Candidates are to maintain social distancing at all times.
- Candidates are to enter the room one by one to allow for the previous candidate to enter the room, use hand sanitizer and find her/his seat.
- If candidates are required to show their identification document, they should be the only ones to handle their own identification document/s.
- Candidates may be required to remove their mask momentarily on entering the examination hall until their identification is confirmed.
- Candidates are to exit the room one by one and in an orderly manner to respect physical distancing between persons, using hand sanitizer on the way out. They are to be encouraged not to congregate at the exit of the examination venue but leave the venue immediately.



Any invigilator, other staff member or candidate who exhibits any symptoms or feels unwell must not be allowed to enter the examination venue at any point. Any candidate or member of staff reporting or noted to exhibit any potential symptoms of Covid-19 during the examination should be moved to a designated isolation area. One could consider an isolation area for students who are noted to become symptomatic during the examination. This should be considered in order to cause least disruption to all present.

As per Public Health protocol, any student who is found to be in close contact with a positive case would have to be placed in mandatory quarantine. This includes both the direct contact and also one's household members.

How to stay informed: www.covid19health.gov.mt