

AS SCHOOLS REOPEN ON JANUARY 29, 2024, CARITAS ZAMBIA CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO STRENGTHEN CHOLERA PREVENTION AND CONTROL EFFORTS AS WELL AS PREVENTIVE MEASURES AGAINST THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN SCHOOLS.

PRESS RELEASE

18th January 2024

CRITICAL ALERT: As we stand on the brink of schools reopening on January 29, 2024, Caritas Zambia issues an immediate call to Government through the Ministry of Education and Health to enact stringent and decisive measures to combat the dual threats of a devastating Cholera outbreak and the insidious resurgence of COVID-19 within our educational institutions.

The Cholera crisis that has gripped our nation since October 2023 has reached alarming proportions, with over 9,500 of our citizens afflicted and a staggering 374 lives lost. With a fatality rate of 3.9%, the situation is dire. The scourge of Cholera has swept through 9 out of 10 provinces, with Lusaka bearing the brunt, hosting more than 90% of the cases. It is a harrowing reality that the youngest amongst us, children under 15, constitute 52% of these cases - a clarion call that we must prioritize their protection and wellbeing.

The reopening of schools must not add fuel to the fire. It is imperative that the government, in collaboration with the Ministries of Education and Health, mobilize a thorough and robust plan to safeguard our children's return to their classrooms. *This includes:*

- Ensuring all water sources within schools are secured against contamination, mandating rigorous chlorination protocols to guarantee safe drinking water for every child.
- Installation of additional handwashing stations with soap and treated water in schools to foster frequent and proper hand hygiene.
- Ensure adequate water supply in schools with flushable toilets.
- Establishment of swift testing, isolation, and treatment protocols for any student exhibiting Cholera symptoms to prevent further transmission within school grounds.

Furthermore, the specter of COVID-19 looms large once more, with the emergence of a new variant contributing to a global resurgence. We implore the government to implement enhanced and targeted COVID-19 preventative strategies, mindful of the WHO's findings on the asymptomatic nature of this new strain, to prevent a catastrophic outbreak amongst our vulnerable children.

The government's mandate must extend beyond prevention; comprehensive strategies for immediate response to any cases within schools must be established. The health and education of

our children hang in the balance, and we must ensure that the ongoing Cholera crisis does not derail their right to a safe and quality education. Ensuring that children live in a clean and health environment is critical.

In light of the extended holiday period, Caritas Zambia also insists on the development of 'catch-up' academic plans to mitigate the impact of lost instructional time. This is to ensure the continuity, quality and standard of education remains uncompromised.

The time for action is now. We must unite in these efforts to shield our children and communities from the ravages of Cholera and COVID-19. Our children's safety and future depend on the immediate and effective response of our leaders.

May God bless and protect our nation and its people.

Yours in Service and Urgency,



Fr. Dr. Gabriel Mapulanga
Executive Director, Caritas Zambia