

## **My Essay for the Covid Cognizance Contest**

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This year has been a strange one indeed! Since the end of Feb 2020, the world has been faced with the Covid – 19 crisis and the reach of this virus has been unlike anything we have ever dealt with before. Initially, governments and people assumed that similar to SARS and MERS, this will also dwindle, but we are almost 6 months into it now and there still seems to be no end. People have adopted various safety measures which include staying indoors, wearing masks, frequent sanitizing and hand washing, social distancing and this feels like the new normal.

However, there are still sections of society which are deeply affected by the lockdowns that have been mandatorily imposed by governments. Today, in my essay, I am going to be focusing on three main areas – impact on schools, workplace safety measures and recommendations on social gatherings.

Starting with, should schools be opening this year; I think the answer would depend on various factors, some of them being - technological capabilities, the Covid -19 positivity rate (3% is considered as the general benchmark) in the locality of the school etc.

School administrators have come up with some very innovative ideas to make schooling even under these trying circumstances possible. Some of these include staggering classes and breaking them into smaller batches, bringing in older kids who can follow social distancing and other norms, starting schools for rural areas where there are technological challenges to online schooling.

All of this of course would come with copious number of precautions not limited to frequent cleaning and sanitization of premises, additional safety measures etc.

It is very difficult to come up with a one size – fits all solution for this problem and I think the best way to deal with this for schools to have a more customized phased approach depending on which category they fall under.

Moving on to social gathering, it is a paradox. When facing a pandemic like this, people want to spend time with family and friends to help them get through the tough times. Yet there have been many instances in the last few months to show that gatherings like these have led to large scale outbreaks. These include a congregation at a church in France, beach goers in Australia, a funeral in Italy etc.

The key matter to be assessed here is to distinguish between essential and non- essential gatherings and recommendations are to avoid the latter at all costs.

This brings me to the last part of my essay - workplace considerations

Most workplaces around the world have opened up though many regions still work on a reduced capacity. Other than the standard precautions, there are certain additional considerations that workplaces would need to adopt including clear tracking of outsiders like vendors, suppliers etc, continuous cleaning of common areas like cafeterias, restrooms, hallways, temperature controls, protocols if an employee tests positive etc.

Another important aspect that is the employers need to ensure that the mental health of the employees is given due attention during these already tough times. Frequent tests for employees and their families, adequate insurance coverage, paid leave if an employee tests positive are some measures that may be considered.

In conclusion, needless to say our world has changed and it is the responsibility of our leaders to spread awareness among the masses and continue the relief support packages, media to accurately report on the changing landscape and finally on each individual to be covid cognizant.