

# Reopening Protocols for Higher Education Institutions

Ensuring Safe Operations for Faculty, Staff, and Students

# Welcome Back

"We thank God for the experiences we have gone through, the challenges we have learned from, and the circumstances that have made us."

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

**We have come through a difficult time, made possible by the strength and unity of the community.**

**Our highest priority has always been, and remains, the safety and security of our community.**

**Today is about preparing to respond effectively, together as a community.**

# Objectives

By the end of this protocol  
you will be:

**1** Aware of preparations needed for reopening

**2** Informed on roles and responsibilities

**3** Ready to respond in case of an emergency

**4** Prepared for effective communication

## Guiding Principles



### 1. People First

- Students and staff safety first
- Lives first, always
- Never go back for possessions – leave them behind



### 2. Stay Indoors

- Indoors only
- No outdoor activities or assemblies



### 3. Safe Zones

- Avoid windows, glass, and open areas
- Move to safe zones when needed
- Identify assembly point



### 4. Official Alerts

- Follow official alerts immediately
- No unofficial info or social media



### 5. Dual Delivery

- Asynchronous and pre-recorded lectures are permitted for online learners
- Institutions may offer hybrid delivery to accommodate students who are not in the country
- Asynchronous and pre-recorded lectures are permitted for online learners

Possessions and buildings can be replaced, but lives cannot be compensated.

# Environment Readiness

## Indoor Operations and Safe Zones

### Space Requirements

- Solid walls, concrete roof, no exposure to external areas
- Ventilation available without exposure to a dangerous source
- Emergency exits and assembly points identified and clearly marked
- Institutions operating within shared free zone facilities, DIAC, Dubai Knowledge Park, and DIFC Academy, must coordinate safe zone identification and evacuation mapping with the free zone operator. Safe zones cannot be designated unilaterally by the institution where the building and common areas are managed by the free zone.

### Planning and Mapping

- Safe zones clearly marked on evacuation maps and emergency plans
- Every staff member must know safe zones in their room
- Distributed across the building for quick access

### Safe Zone Rules

- Designated away from windows and glass
- If no safe zone exists, the room must not be used
- Reachable within 1 minute from any location
- Multiple safe zones per building to cover all areas
- Easy access without crossing outdoor or exposed areas

### Training and Readiness

- All staff trained on protocols and familiar with evacuation routes
- Roles assigned in advance, not on the day
- Emergency go-bag ready prepared and accessible (first aid, register, contact details)



- **KHDA approval required before reopening**
- No institution may operate without signing the KHDA reopening Acknowledgement and Consent Form

## Supervision and Wellbeing

**Your calm matters more than you think. Students look to you – a steady voice and relaxed body language can prevent panic before it starts.**

### Students

Supported and accounted for at all times

- Clear and consistent communication maintained to provide stability
- Monitor for anxiety, regression or behaviour changes
- Log and report concerns — do not dismiss

### Staff

*Your calm is the most powerful tool*

- No fear-inducing language or imagery
- Respond to distress with sensitivity
- Staff wellbeing equally prioritised

### Environment

Safe, calm and never alone

- Positive, calm atmosphere always
- Minimum two staff per learning environment during an alert
- No one manages an emergency alone
- Support is available – you don't have to cope alone

**Remember: During exceptional periods, students may show signs of regression or anxiety. These must be logged and reported and not ignored.**

# Understanding Your Stress Response

## What your body does

The threat response — fight or flight

- Heart races**  
Blood pumps faster to prepare your muscles for action
- Breathing becomes shallow**  
Quick, short breaths — your body wants more oxygen fast
- Tunnel vision**  
Focus narrows to the threat — everything else blurs
- Muscles tense**  
Your body braces — shoulders rise, jaw tightens

## How to take back control

Simple techniques that actually work

- 1 Box breathing**  
Breathe in for 4 seconds; hold for 4; breathe out for 4; hold for 4. Repeat 3 times. Slows your heart rate immediately.
- 2 Feet flat, feel the floor**  
Press both feet firmly to the ground. This physical anchor brings you back to the present.
- 3 5-4-3-2-1 grounding**  
Name 5 things you see · 4 you can hear · 3 you can touch · 2 you smell · 1 you can taste. Breaks tunnel vision fast.
- 4 Long exhale**  
Breathe in normally, exhale slowly for twice as long. Activates your body's natural calm response.

**You are more capable than you feel in that moment.** These responses are your body protecting you - work with them, not against them.

This is normal. When we sense threat, our bodies respond automatically - it's biology, not weakness. Understanding what's happening helps you take back control.

## Psychological First Aid (PFA)

An immediate humane response for students experiencing distress after a crisis or emergency. It aims to provide practical care and support, reduce distress, and help meet basic needs.

### 1. Look

- Observe students for signs of distress or emotional reactions.
- Check the surrounding environment to make sure it is safe and identify anyone who may need urgent assistance.

### 2. Listen

- Approach affected students calmly.
- Listen to their concerns without pressure, help reassure them and reduce fear, and use a calm, reassuring tone of voice.

### 3. Link

- Make sure the student is in a safe place, reassure them, and guide them toward simple steps that help restore a sense of calm.
- Connect students with appropriate support when needed, such as specialists, social workers, or counsellors.
- Help them access assistance as quickly as possible.

## Supporting Students of Determination (1/2)

*Coordination to be led by the institution's designated accessibility or student services office in line with national and local policies.  
Individual evacuation plans must be confirmed prior to reopening.*

### Motor Difficulties

- Assign a dedicated evacuation buddy – confirmed before reopening, not on the day
- Use evacuation chairs or equivalent mobility assistance equipment as available and appropriate to the institution's facilities – staff must know their location and how to use them
- Never use lifts under any circumstances
- If the student cannot be moved, direct to the nearest safe rescue point and stay with them – do not leave to rejoin the group
- Staff responsibility: practice the route with the student during calm periods, so it is not new in an emergency

### Visual Impairments

- Provide continuous verbal description of every step and direction – narrate what is happening throughout
- Guide physically – place your hand on the student's shoulder and lead calmly at their pace
- Never leave unaccompanied at any point – stay with the student until confirmed safe at the assembly point
- Staff responsibility: walk the evacuation route with the student regularly, so they are familiar with it before an emergency

## Supporting Students of Determination (2/2)

### Hearing Impairments

- Never rely on verbal alarms alone – confirm the student has received the alert before moving
- Use clear visual signals: flashing lights, firm hand signals, or pre-prepared written cards
- Maintain direct eye contact throughout – face the student when giving any instruction
- Staff responsibility: visual alert cards must be prepared, labelled, and kept in the room at all times – not made in an emergency

### Autism & Sensory Needs

- Use pre-agreed sensory support tools to reduce distress from alarms — keep them in the teaching space, not in a storeroom
- Use pre-agreed visual or written communication tools as determined by the institution's accessibility or student services office, to explain each step in sequence, one instruction at a time
- Keep communication calm, short, and predictable – avoid raised voices or sudden changes in tone
- Designated accessibility support officer or pre-agreed key contact must remain with the student for the entire evacuation — handover to another staff member only when the student is settled and safe
- Staff responsibility: practice the evacuation sequence with the student using the communication tools agreed with the accessibility or student services office during calm periods, not on the day

# Daily Operations and Emergency Response

Entry, departure, supervision, wellbeing, and response

## Responding to Alerts

### SHELTER



Local incident, no direct impact

Projectile or falling debris

- Never leave students unattended to investigate an alert
- Stay with your group until an official instruction is received
- Your place is with the students NOT at the source of the sound
- Monitor official alerts and news

### EVACUATE



Fire, smoke, or gas leak

Suspicious object on or near premises (do not touch)

- Stop all activity and issue a calm, firm instruction
- Check route to assembly point is clear before moving anyone
- Walk quickly and in an orderly line – no running
- Call 997 and 999

### MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

- ❑ Isolate the affected student without disrupting the rest of the group
- ❑ A second staff member immediately takes over group supervision
- ❑ The group must never be left unattended while first aid is being given
- ❑ Call 998 if the situation is life-threatening – do not wait

## Two Operational Risk Levels

### ● GREEN – Low Risk / Stable

- No alert messages
- Normal day continues
- Use indoor facilities
- Enhance readiness at all times
- Morning assembly and outdoor activities suspended

### ● RED – Potential Danger

- Switch to distance learning and remote work
- Do not resume on-site learning without official approval
- Authorities identify high-risk locations to determine response

The relevant authorities determine the risk levels.  
All alert messages must be taken seriously and acted upon immediately.

## Phase 1: Before Arriving at Institution

### No alert

- Student leaves home as usual for school, either with a parent/guardian, HEI transport, or independently

### Alert before departure

- Do not travel to the institution. Remain in your current location and await the official all-clear

### Alert received while en route

- If in independent transport, proceed to the nearest safe, covered location, or return home
- If on HEI transport, students must not be dropped off in exposed areas and must remain inside the bus while staying away from the windows.

- Residential students already on campus should shelter in place within their accommodation and await official guidance from the institution
- International students currently outside the UAE are not subject to this phase. The institution should issue remote learning continuity communications to this cohort directly

## Phase 2: At Arrival

### No alert

- Students and staff enter the building directly upon arrival. No gatherings at entrances, courtyards, or external areas
- No gatherings at gates, courtyards, or external sidewalks

### Alert issued

- Move immediately to the nearest safe covered location and await official guidance from the institution.
- Do not get out of the car or transport unless the situation is safe.
- If entry is possible, move to the nearest pre-designated safe area.

### Remember:

Even under GREEN conditions, morning assembly and outdoor gatherings are suspended.

## Phase 3: While Inside the Institution

### No alert

- Classes/sessions continue as normal
- No activities in courtyards, open areas, or near windows/glass
- Break time and between-session movement is held indoors. Outdoor gathering areas, courtyards, and exposed corridors are not to be used.

### Alert issued

- Stop all activities immediately
- Students and staff move to the nearest safe zone and remain in a low, calm position away from windows and glass

### Staff outside the building:

- Proceed immediately to the nearest safe interior facility. Remaining in open areas is prohibited. In exceptional cases (injury, casualty, or facility impact), the relevant authorities organise dismissal.
- HEI transport drivers must remain inside the buses or proceed to the nearest safe facility if necessary.

## Phase 4: During Departure

### No alert

- Departure proceeds normally in an organised, swift, and gradual manner

### Alert issued

- Departure is suspended immediately. Students and staff are not permitted to leave the building
- Students who are already outside when an alert is issued must proceed immediately to the nearest safe covered location and not leave until alert is lifted
- If students are on the HEI transport, they must remain onboard, lower their heads, and not disembark to exposed areas.

### When alert is lifted

- Departure resumes in a controlled manner once the all-clear is given
- No gathering at entrances or outside areas
- Students leave independently and in an orderly manner

## Rapid Response - The First 3 Minutes

Three critical minutes can determine full control of the situation and prevent a disaster in the HEI environment

1

### Minute 1: Response and decision

Based on the directions given and alert type, make the appropriate immediate decision: evacuate or shelter in place.

2

### Minute 2: Orderly movement

Direct students calmly and without panic according to the pre-designated safe evacuation or shelter procedures.

3

### Minute 3: Assembly and headcount

Reach the assembly point or safe shelter area and immediately begin counting students and reporting any missing persons.

### Firm direction

- Stop any explanation, shouting, or unclear instructions.
- Give students a clear and direct command to leave everything and follow instructions.
- **Suggested command:**  
“Leave your belongings and line up quietly.”

### Check the route

- Make sure the route is safe before directing students to move, to avoid exposing them to danger.
- Watch for any signs of smoke, fire, or obstacles in the corridor or nearby area.

## After the All-Clear

The response does not end when the danger passes. Follow these four steps in order:

1

### Return Protocol

- Await direction from the Academic Head only – no independent decisions on when to return
- Return to rooms in an organised, supervised manner

2

### Final Headcount

- Recount all students, staff, and visitors immediately upon return
- Verify the general condition of each student – note any signs of distress or physical harm

3

### Documentation

- Complete the incident report form – record all injuries, damages, actions taken, and exact times
- Submit to HEI management – do not delay or complete from memory

4

### Ongoing Support

- Activate psychological support for any distressed students – do not wait for them to escalate
- Notify students directly through the institution's official channel. Where appropriate and in line with the institution's communication policy, notify emergency contacts as a secondary step. All communications must remain clear, calm, and factual

# Roles and Responsibilities

Academic Heads and Faculty

## Academic Head is responsible for:

1

ensuring every faculty and staff member is trained on all outlined protocols and participates in practice drills

2

assigning roles to relevant staff members to cover all emergency procedures

3

effectively communicating all required protocol procedures to students and, where appropriate, to their emergency contacts

4

ensuring that faculty members have rehearsed relevant procedures and routines with students during calm periods prior to reopening

KHDA and relevant authorities may conduct monitoring visits from time to time.

## Faculty member's responsibilities:

### 1 On-site leader

Manage the evacuation calmly and direct students clearly toward safe evacuation routes.

### 2 Protector and guide

Ensure all students are evacuated from all teaching and shared spaces and that no student is left behind.

### 3 Communication link

Communicate effectively with the Academic Head and emergency response teams.

### 4 First responder

Provide basic first aid and initial psychological support to students until rescue teams arrive.

You are the first responder in protecting lives and property.

Complete before reopening – and review regularly. If you cannot answer yes to every question, act now – not during an emergency.

## Staff Readiness Checklist

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	TOOLS & EQUIPMENT	STUDENTS' NEEDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know all evacuation routes from my teaching space?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know the assembly point for my cohort?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know when to evacuate vs shelter-in-place?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I tell an official alert from an unofficial one?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know my exact role and responsibilities in an emergency?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Have I physically walked all evacuation routes?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I perform basic first aid, including CPR?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I manage a distressed group without escalating panic?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I apply Psychological First Aid (Look, Listen, Link)?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can I safely carry or move a non-mobile student during evacuation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is the Emergency Go-Bag stocked, accessible, and checked this week?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does it contain: first aid kit, register, emergency contacts and medical info?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is the evacuation map posted clearly and up to date in my teaching space?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I have the Academic Head's direct number saved and accessible?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Do I know every student with additional or medical needs in my course or cohort, and have I confirmed their individual plan with the institution's accessibility or student services office?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is there an individual evacuation plan for each of those students, confirmed with the accessibility or student services office prior to reopening?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Does every student with additional needs have a designated accessibility support officer or pre-agreed key contact?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Is all required medication and emergency equipment accessible at all times?</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Am I actively monitoring for signs of distress or behavior changes?</li> </ul>

# Communication and Compliance

Student and emergency contact engagement,  
access controls and your responsibilities

How we communicate in a crisis defines how students and staff trust us. Every word matters.

## Student and Staff Communication

### ✓ Official channels only

Direct all students and staff to approved institution communications. No personal numbers, no WhatsApp groups, no informal messages.

### ✓ Keep students and staff informed

Share clear, calm updates before, during, and after any incident. Tell them what is happening, what is being done, and what to expect next.

### ✓ Never release without contact

Exhaust every emergency contact if a student cannot be reached or accounted for. No student is released until an authorised person is confirmed. Document every attempt.

**The Academic Head is the sole authorised voice. All other staff refer students and enquiring parties to the Academic Head — no exceptions.**

### ✗ Photograph or film anything

Causes panic, violates privacy, obstructs the response, and carries legal consequences

### ✗ Answer individual calls from students, family members, or external parties while an incident is underway

While an incident is underway your focus must be entirely on the students in your care

### ✗ Share unconfirmed information

No personal opinions, no rumours, no unofficial updates in any form or on any platform

### ✗ Issue the all-clear yourself

Never pre-empt the Academic Head. Wait for official confirmation before communicating anything to students or external parties

## External Communication Protocol

All staff are strictly prohibited from photographing, recording, or publishing any information about the incident on social media.

### Protecting privacy

Photographing students in vulnerable situations is a violation of their privacy.

### Preventing the spread of rumors

Fragmented or incomplete information can create panic and misinformation.

### Maintaining a single official channel

The Academic Head is the only authorised person to issue official statements on behalf of the institution.

### Avoiding disruption to the response

Uncontrolled communications can overwhelm emergency networks and hinder operations.

Photography during emergencies is prohibited both legally and ethically.

## Academic Head's Checklist

### 1 Train staff

Train all staff on protocols.  
Use a train-the-trainer model to cascade using KHDA materials

### 2 Dual delivery

Separate provision for in-person and distance learners. Hybrid must not disrupt learning or overburden faculty and instructors

### 3 Staff wellbeing

Protect the wellbeing of all faculty, academic staff, and support staff throughout the reopening process.

### 4 Emergency plans

Submit shelter-in-place, evacuation, and emergency plans as part of application submission. Conduct drills with staff and students.

### 5 Submit data

E.g., on-site vs remote students, international students currently outside the UAE, residential vs commuter students, on-site vs remote staff  
(specific data points TBC)

### 6 Contacts

Provide details for HEI leads and emergency contact details for each enrolled student.

## Pre-requisites for Reopening

### 1. Need to complete the application form if not already submitted

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### 2. Attend Training

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- All institutions must attend the KHDA reopening training session
- Attendance must be registered to confirm participation

### 3. Sign Declaration

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- Institutions sign a declaration confirming faculty and staff have completed the training and all required safety assessments are in place
- The signed acknowledgement and consent form
- The institute's proof of readiness
- Date of intended reopening required on the acknowledgement and consent form

### 4. Safe Zone Inspection

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- A KHDA team will visit every institution to assess safe zones against an agreed rubric. For institutions in shared free zone facilities — DIAC, Dubai Knowledge Park, and DIFC Academy — the inspection will be coordinated with the relevant free zone operator
- All visits to be completed by mid-week

### 5. Approval to Reopen

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- Institutions receive KHDA approval to reopen once the inspection is cleared
- Staggered reopening is permitted — based on each institution's readiness

## Have a question?

Scan the QR code to submit any questions related to the reopening protocols or other related matters.

Your questions will help us compile a FAQ to support the sector.

Education Institution Physical  
Reopening Readiness Questions



# Key Reminders

**Safety first. Indoor only. Follow official alerts.  
Communicate through approved channels.**

# Appendix

## Practical Scenarios

## Training Scenario 1: Sudden Alarm

**Situation:** During a lecture or class session in the middle of the day, the fire alarm suddenly sounded continuously. Some students were startled and began shouting, while others moved randomly toward the door.

### Immediate Control

Direct students in a calm, audible voice:

"Stop where you are."

This helps prevent pushing and confusion and restores order in the room or lecture hall.

### Check the Route

Open the door with extreme caution and confirm that the corridor is clear of smoke or fire before evacuating students.

### Orderly Evacuation

Guide students to leave in an orderly line and move calmly toward the designated assembly point according to the evacuation plan. In lecture halls with large student numbers, direct students to exit in sections rather than all at once to prevent crowding at exits.

## Training Scenario 2: Evacuation Amid Disorder

**Situation:** During the evacuation, some students began pushing in the corridor because they saw light smoke, and one of them fell to the ground in the middle of the panic.

**Challenge:** How do you regain control of the students and continue the evacuation without stopping it completely?

### Correct Response

1

Give a firm and clear command to stop the pushing immediately.

2

Help the fallen student quickly and calmly back to their feet.

3

Restore order and continue the evacuation safely.

Firm control prevents disasters.

## Training Scenario 3: An Injured Student

**Situation:** During the evacuation on the stairs, one student tripped and fell, resulting in a leg injury and inability to stand, while other students continued moving behind him.

### 1 Secure the route immediately

Calm the students around the injured student and continue the evacuation in an orderly manner to prevent crowding.

### 3 Call for immediate assistance

Send a student only if appropriate under your emergency procedures, or use the fastest available means to alert the institution's emergency team.

### 2 Quick assessment

Check the student's condition without moving them if there is a suspected fracture or severe injury, to reduce the risk of complications.

### 4 Stay with the injured student

Remain with the injured student, reassure them, and provide any safe basic assistance possible until rescue or medical support arrives.