



India Needs To Learn - A Case for Keeping Schools Open

TEACH**FOR**INDIA

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Recommendations developed in consultation with & endorsed by 35+ organizations...



and also supported by public health leaders including...

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Executive Summary (1/3)

India has now had pandemic-driven school closures for ~2 years

- Schools were mostly shut from Mar 2020 till year end; 2021 saw small phases of opening
- In 2021, while secondary schools were open for 40-50% time, elementary schools have mostly remained shut for 12/22 major Indian states

While many efforts have been made towards online education, penetration and effectiveness remain woefully inadequate

- 40-70% children don't have a device at home; >80% teachers expressed impossibility of maintaining emotional connect
- ~90% children lost at least one specific language ability, significant SEL¹ losses (more so for children with special needs)
- As per World Bank, every year of schooling lost translates to potentially ~9% lower future earnings for a student

Prolonged school closures have serious implications, extending beyond learning e.g., increased child exploitation, lower nutrition with constrained mid-day meals, social and emotional issues

80%+ parents would like schools to open for in-person learning per multiple surveys, given multiple challenges with online learning:

- Academic: ~37% parents responded their child didn't study at all at home, 71% responded child didn't have a test/exam in last 3 months
- Behavioral: ~49% parents responded their child is facing an improper schedule (e.g., for studying, sleeping, eating etc.)

While schools were globally shut in 2020 (first half), many countries kept schools largely open through 2021; e.g., Australia (85-90% open), Japan (85-90% open), South Africa (80-85% open), US (75-80% open), UK (70-75% open), Portugal (60-65% open), China (90%+ open)

- This is despite considerably higher disease incidence vs India (25k cases per million population) in other countries e.g., UK (197k), US (169k), Portugal (141k), South Africa (58k)
- In fact, many countries prioritized keeping schools open vis-a-vis malls, shops, gyms etc. (e.g., France, UK, Canada) such that schools were last to close and first to open

Executive Summary (2/3)

Public health arguments indicate low school re-opening risk

- Children <20 yrs had 3-6x lower incidence; 17x+ lower fatality vs adults even in countries with open schools
- Infection transmission in school-going children was observed to be lower e.g., new cases per 1000 population lower in school children vs community; despite school re-opening across select Indian states in mid-2021, cases didn't spike (e.g., Punjab, Maharashtra etc.)
- Increasing vaccination penetration (~45% fully vaccinated in India) likely to lead to lower hospitalization and fatality; and infection severity expected to be 40%+ further lower in Omicron vs Delta (for vaccinated individuals)

India's continued centralized decision making implies that even in districts with <25 daily cases, schools are shut (~70% districts pan India)

- Since 2020, many countries have moved from national/state level to a lower unit of governance to avoid mass school closures
- For e.g., US, UK, Australia, Pakistan, Nepal have defined clear norms for schools to open and close at district/county/school level

Countries which have re-opened schools have undertaken initiatives to curb transmission on multiple dimensions

- Social distancing e.g., single row desk arrangement in 'face-to-back' setting (Hong Kong), outdoor classes (Denmark)
- Masks/ face shields e.g., mandatory masks (Spain), face shield mandate for younger students (Singapore)
- Testing e.g., twice-a-week compulsory rapid antigen tests (UK & Germany)
- Staggering school timings e.g., classes in 2 shifts (Hong Kong), staggered school start/recess/end times (UK)
- Forming student pods/bubbles e.g., classmates divided into cohorts, & do not mix with members of other cohorts (Norway)
- Vaccination e.g., prioritized booster doses for teachers (Canada, US), in-school vaccination for students (UK)

Executive Summary (3/3)

Hence, critical for India to move to a philosophy of schools being "last to close, first to open" and act on 4 key implications

- Decentralize school re-opening and closures (e.g., ward, Gram Panchayat, school level) with clearly defined norms
- Offer blended learning construct through the year i.e. in addition to offline, continue online education
- Strengthen testing (e.g., weekly antigen tests), vaccination (e.g., mandatory for school staff), safety protocol (e.g., masking etc.) and ventilation (e.g., leverage outdoors spaces, keep doors/windows open, monitor ventilation etc.)
- Prepare to bridge learning gaps caused by pandemic-driven school closures, and allocate sufficient resources for the same

However, beyond just re-opening, it will take considerable mission-mode resilience from all stakeholders to gain what is lost & build back better

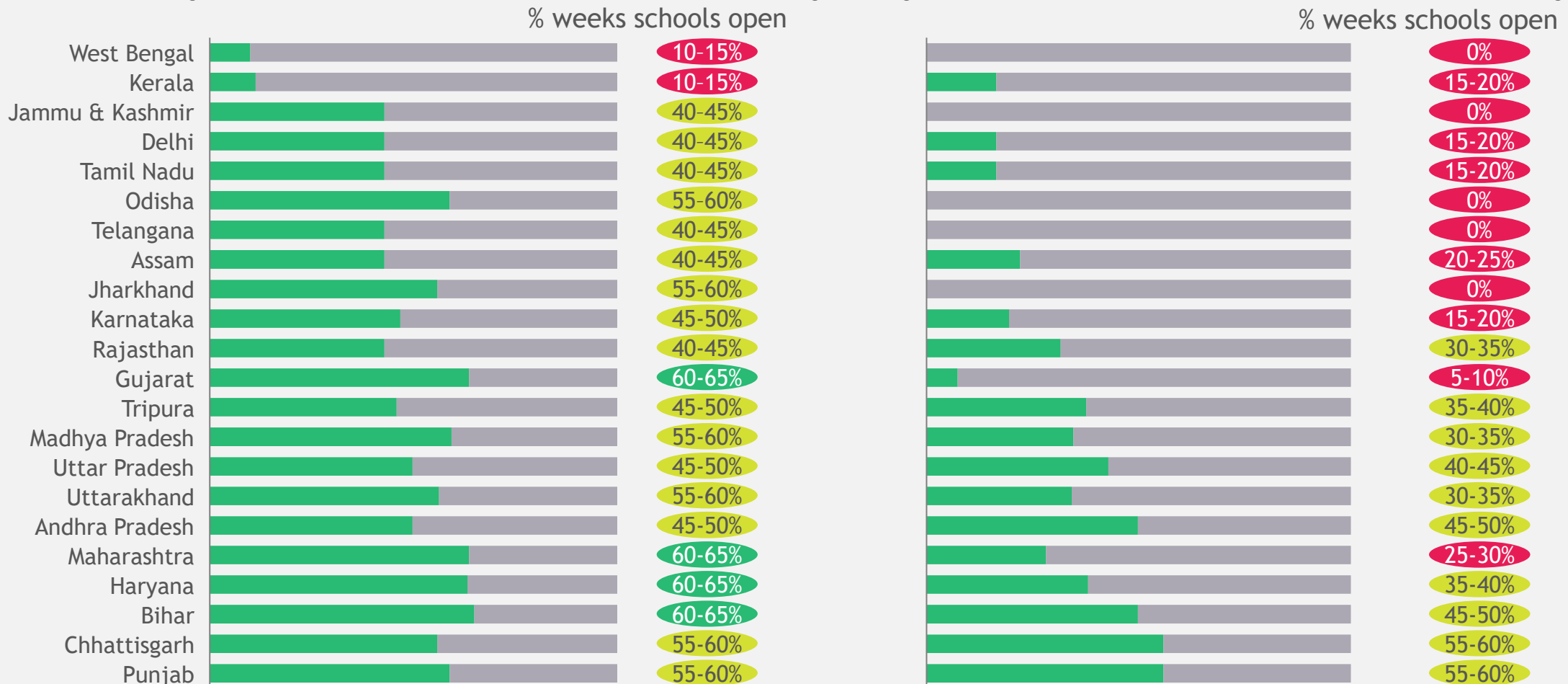
- Govt: Build a robust mid-term (3-5 year) roadmap to bridge learning gap, with adequate infrastructure upgradation and funding support
- Local administrators & school staff: Make education a priority by regularly monitoring in-school preparedness and adherence to protocols
- Parents: Trust the system by sending their children to school and encourage children to follow Covid-appropriate behavior

India has now had pandemic-driven school closures for ~2 years

Schools mostly shut from Mar 2020 till year end; even 2021 saw small phases of opening

In 2021, while secondary schools were open for 40-50% time...

... elementary schools have mostly remained shut for 12 of 22 major states



Source: Press search
 Note: Only those states with more than 1 Cr population included; data available from 25 Apr to 9 December 2021

>60% 30-60% <30%

While many efforts have been made towards online education...

... its penetration and effectiveness is woefully inadequate leading to abysmal outcomes



Online learning



YouTube telecasts



TV lessons



WhatsApp videos



E-content portals



Penetration

40-70%

Children don't have a **device** at home¹

>70%

Rural population doesn't have **internet access**²



Effectiveness

>80%

Teachers expressed impossibility of **maintaining emotional connect** with children during online classes^{3,7}

>90%

Teachers expressed serious challenges in **assessing students** online³

Outcomes

~**90% children** lost at least one specific language ability⁴

A student who lost a year of learning will only be able to recuperate in **9-14 years**⁵

One year of schooling lost translates to potentially ~**9% lower future earnings**⁶ for a student

There are also several other challenges with online schooling



Increased child exploitation

- 490% increase¹ reported in child rescue requests during school closures
- 9 Mn additional children at child labor risk² globally



Access to nutrition/mid-day meals

- ~35% children didn't get midday meals³ during school closures, which could potentially lead to higher burden of malnourished children
- >39 billion in-school meals missed⁴ globally since the start of the pandemic due to school closures⁴



Social & emotional issues

- One-third of primary and half of secondary students have faced poor mental and socio-emotional health since May 2020⁵

Most parents advocating for school reopening...

80%+

Parents keen for schools to reopen in offline mode, basis multiple surveys:

1. Survey by TFI and Akanksha Foundation (6400+ parents)
2. Emergency Report on School Children (1400+ parents)
3. LEAD survey (10500+ parents)

...driven by multiple challenges with virtual learning

% parents reported challenge



Child not studying at all at home

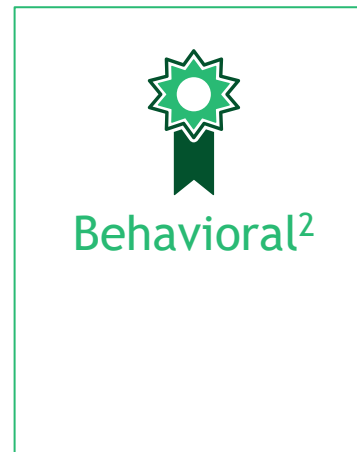
37%

Child unable to read a few words

48%

Child did not have test/exam in 3 months

71%



Child is facing an improper schedule (e.g., for studying, sleeping, eating etc.)

49%

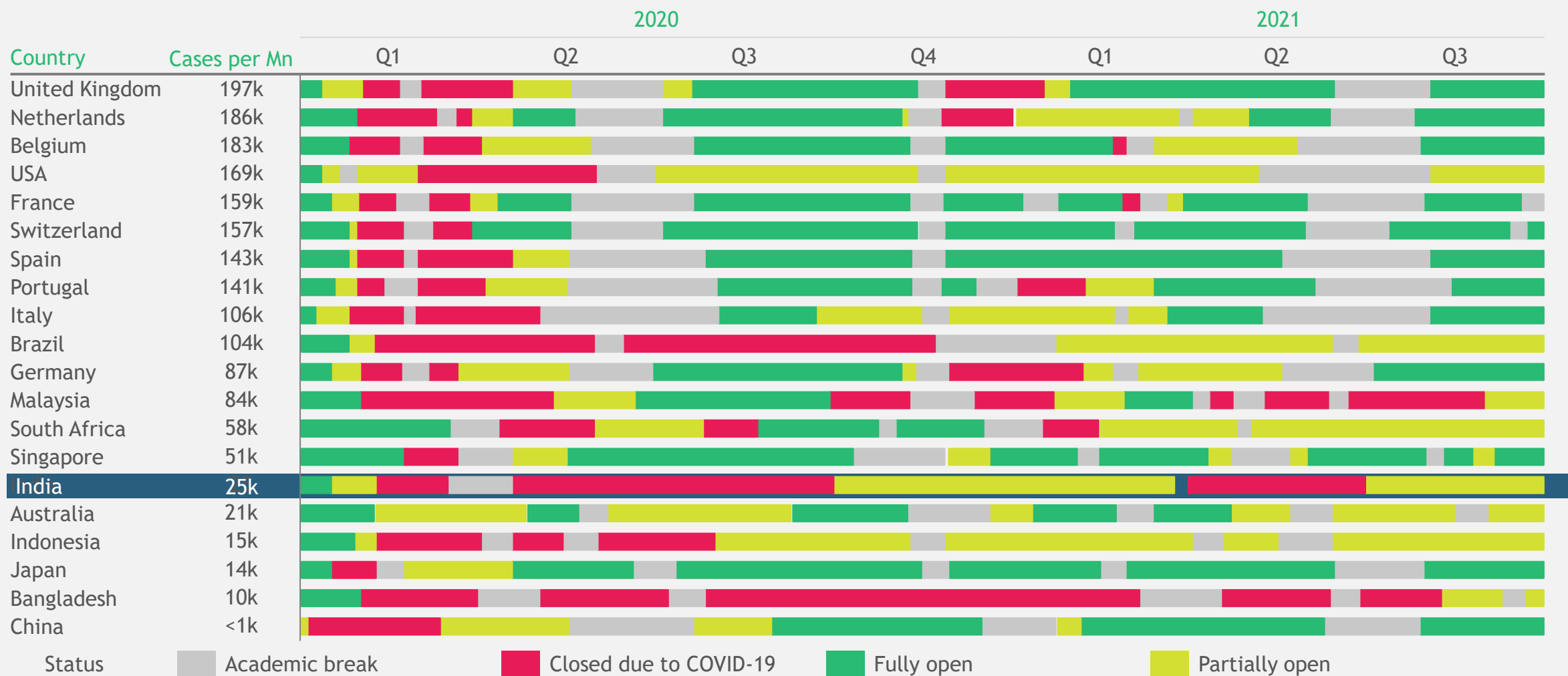
Child misses interacting with friends

47%

Child is facing health issues (stress on eyes, headaches etc.)

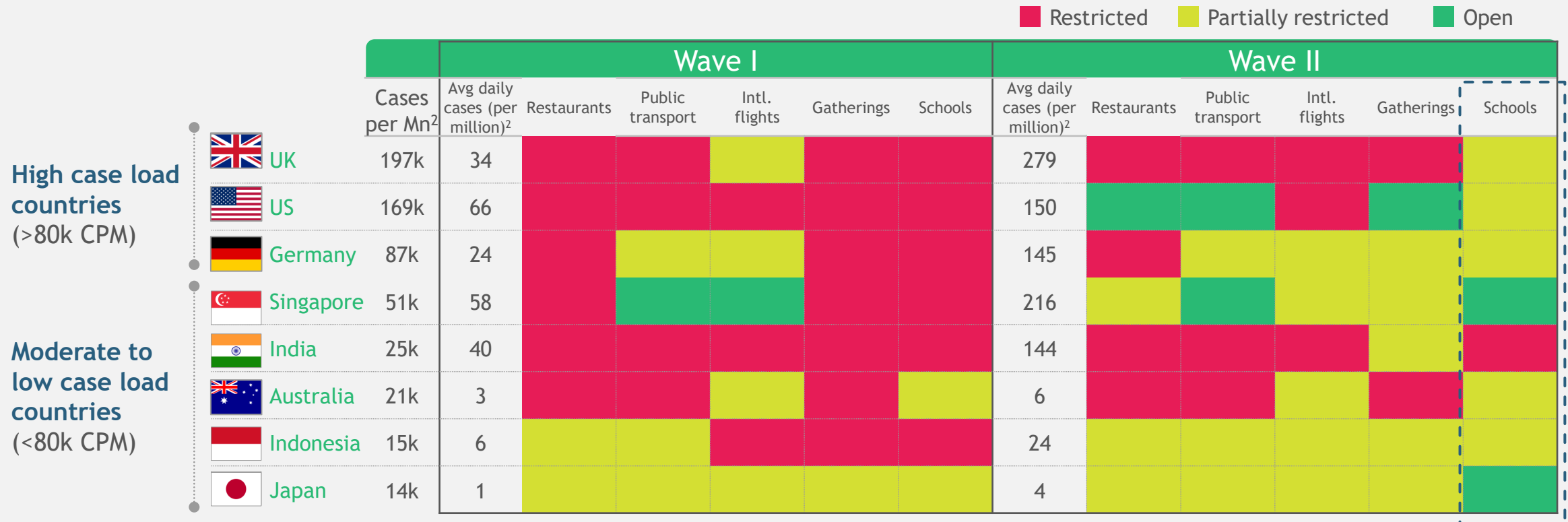
42%

While schools were globally shut in 2020 (first half), many countries kept schools largely open through subsequent waves



Source: UNESCO database capturing school closure information from Feb'20 to Oct'21; media reports; Our World in Data for Covid case data (as on 3 January 2022)

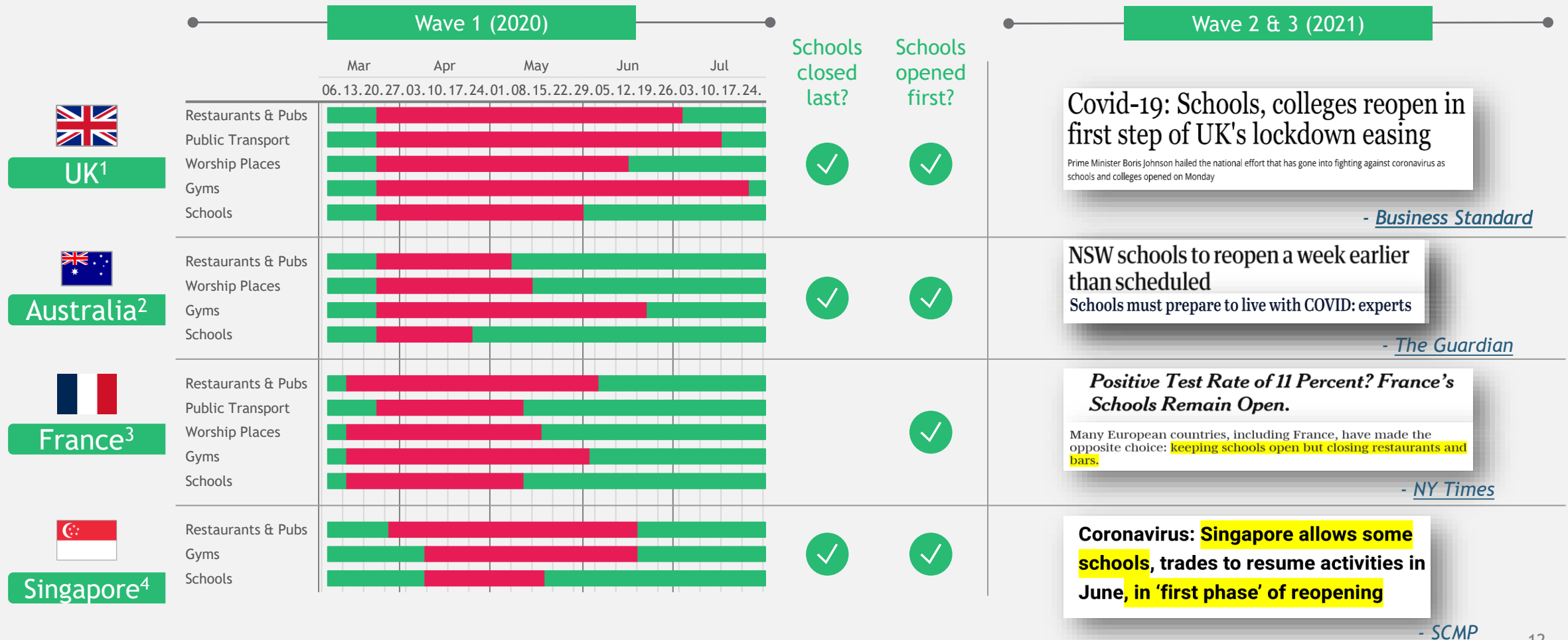
Even though other countries imposed strict preventive measures, schools were rarely closed completely in wave 2



Realizing large scale learning losses caused by school closures in wave 1, **most nations (except India) kept schools partially or fully open** during subsequent waves despite **much higher case loads**

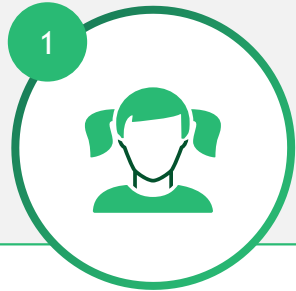
Note: Time period for Wave 1 & Wave 2 have been considered at a country level; preventive measure status has been indicated during peak of infections during a given wave
 Source: 1. Facts for preventive measures: Forbes; germany-visa.org; NPR; BBC News 2. Data for CPM/Avg daily cases (per million): Our World in Data (as of 3 January 2022 for cumulative CPM)

In fact, many countries prioritized keeping schools open vis-a-vis malls, shops, gyms and religious places



Sources: 1. BBC, Churchtimes, Govt. press release, Govt press release, Govt press release, BBC; 2. ABC, Guardian, Guardian, SBS, ABC; 3. Politico, Forbes, The Local, The Local, Aljazeera, Aljazeera, Euronews, BBC; 4. Straitstimes, TodayOnline, ChannelNewsAsia

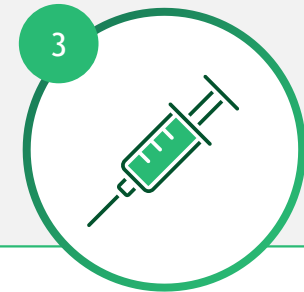
There are several public health arguments suggesting limited risk of school re-opening



Low infection severity and mortality amongst children



Even when schools reopened, cases didn't spike in the community (e.g., for parents, grandparents)



Reduced severity with increased vaccination

Hence, school re-opening also advocated by top global organizations









Schools to be among the last places to close and first to reopen





Children under 20 years had 3-6x lower Covid-19 incidence and 17x+ lower fatality vs adults

● Upto 4 ● >4

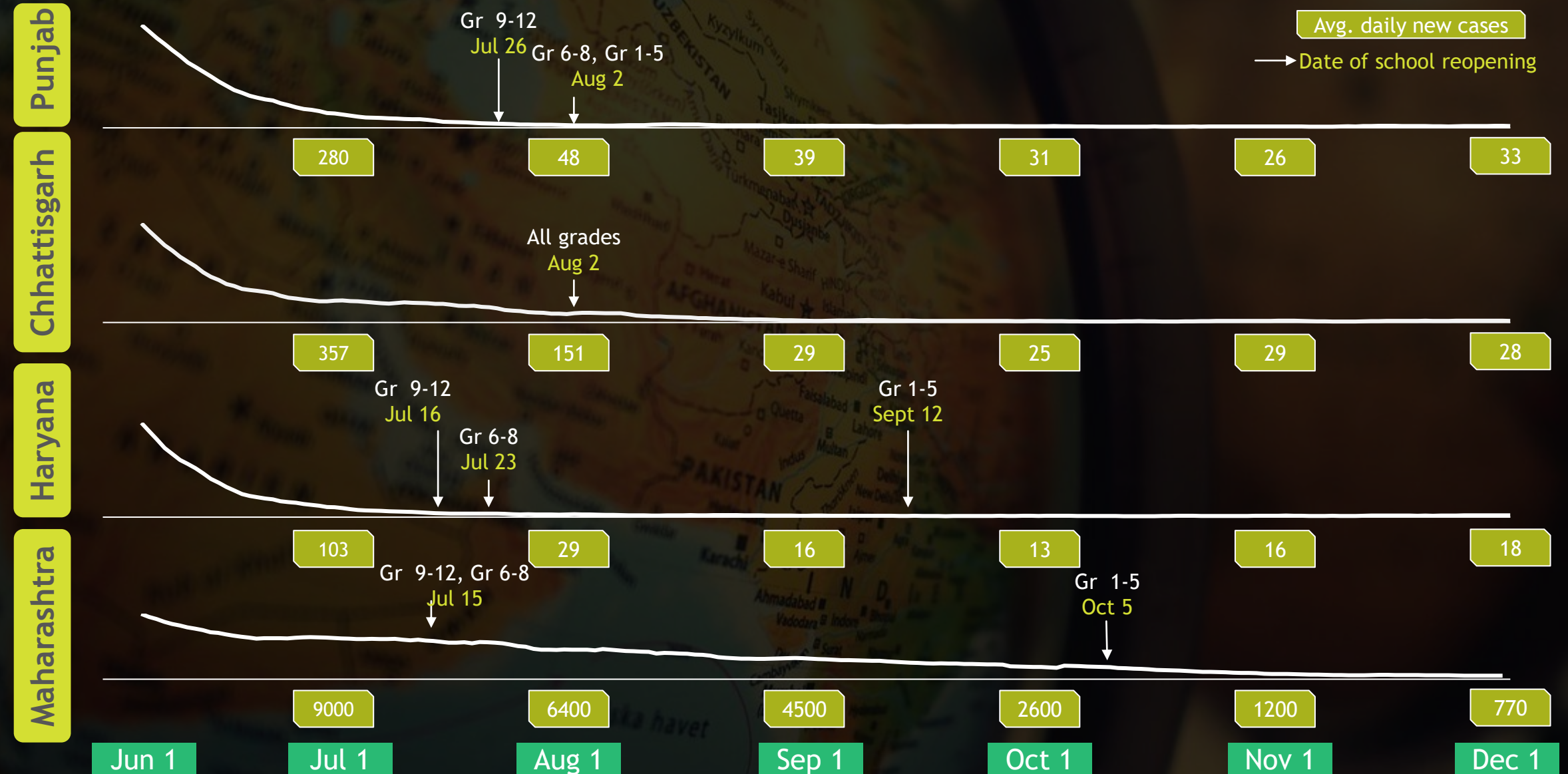
Country ¹	Incidence (Cases per million)			Fatality (case fatality rate - %)		
	Upto 20 yrs (Cases per million)	20-60 yrs (xx times of 0-20 yrs)	60+ yrs (xx times of 0-20 yrs)	Upto 20 yrs (Case fatality rate - %)	20-60 yrs (xx times of 0-20 yrs)	60+ yrs (xx times of 0-20 yrs)
 USA	2342	4.1	3.8	0.05	19	~310
 Germany	831	3.5	2.8	0.02	20	~880
 India	178	3.4	2.2	0.40	4	~40
 Australia	70	5.3	5.6	Not available		
 Indonesia	59	4.8	4.6	0.96	3.9	~17
 Japan	28	5.7	3.9	Not available		

>50% children² in India have developed Covid-19 antibodies - hence they face **1/5th the risk of subsequent infection³**

As of 30 June 2020

Source: 1. COVERAGE database (Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research) 2. [India Today](#) 3. [LANCET](#)

Even when schools opened in select Indian states, cases in the community didn't spike

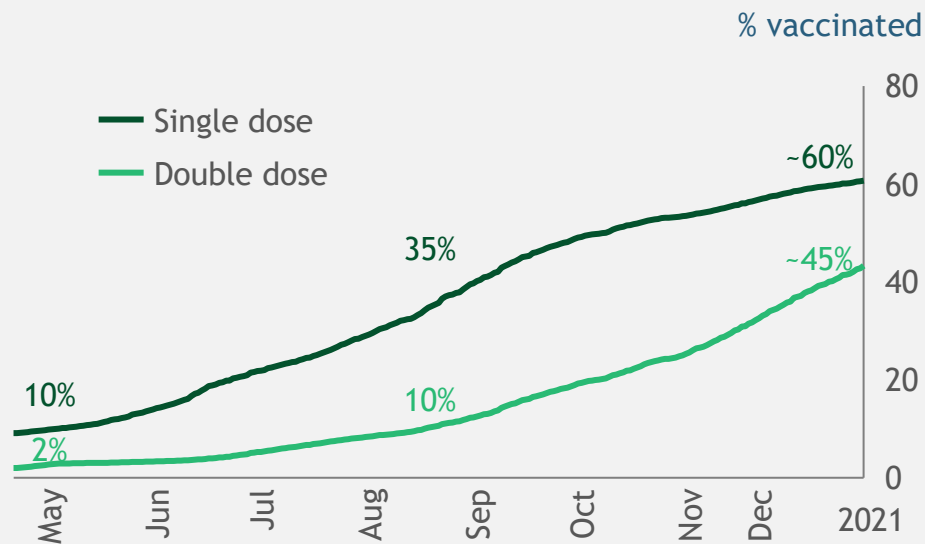


Source: [Covid19tracker.in](https://covid19tracker.in) Note: Avg. daily new cases have been calculated for the week starting on the reported date



With ramped up vaccination, even lower severity expected

With increasing vaccine penetration in India (~60% single dose, ~45% double dose)...






... reduced hospitalization and fatality expected (even for those infected by Omicron)

Reduced risk for fully vaccinated individuals against Delta

- 89-96% reduction in hospitalization
- 92-98% reduction in fatality

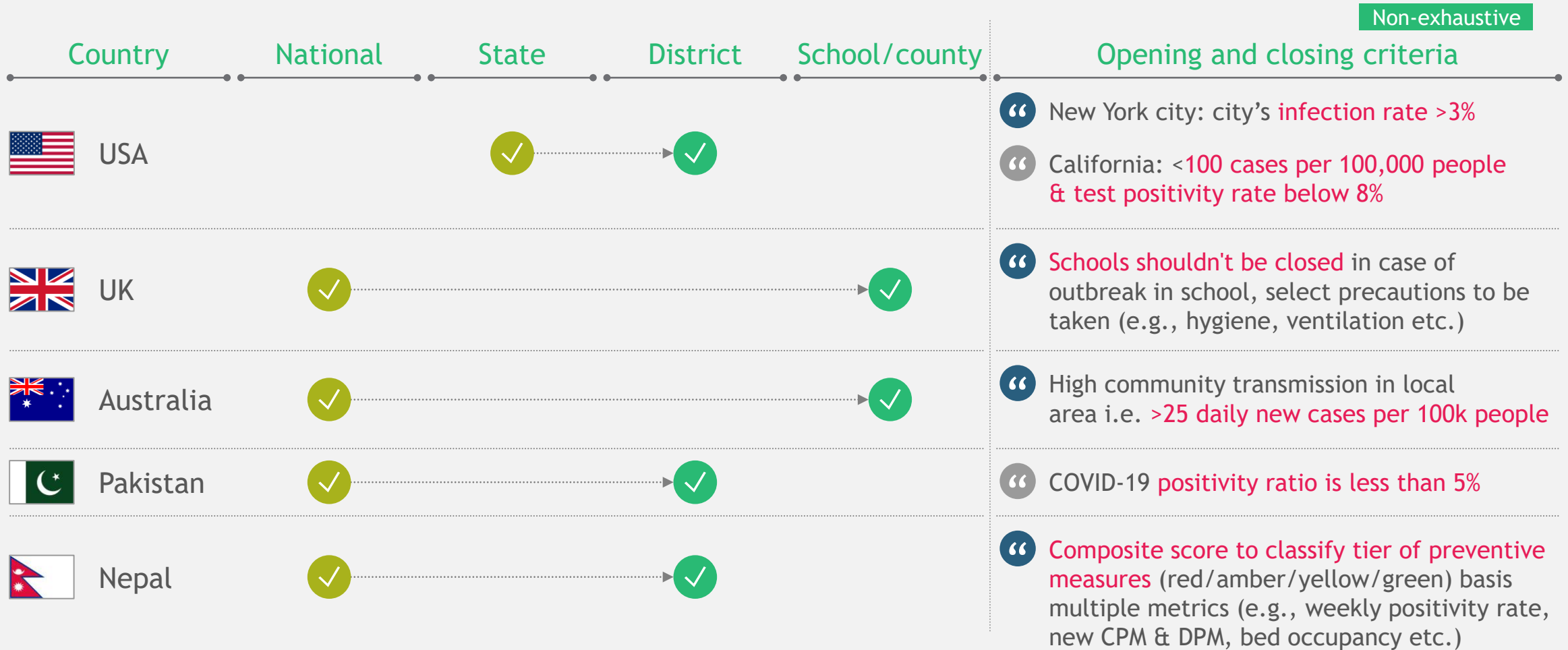
Basis real-world data, Omicron cases are seeing further reduced hospitalization vs Delta

Country	% lower hospitalization ¹ vs Delta
 USA	75-80%
 South Africa	75-80%
 England	40-45%

1. Compared to Delta, for vaccinated individuals

Source: Our World In Data for India's case and vaccine penetration, IDP Journal for vaccine efficacy; For Omicron severity- University of Edinburgh, Imperial University, MedRxiv, Washington Post

Since 2020, many countries have moved from national/state level to a lower unit of governance to avoid mass school closures



Multiple other countries (e.g., Thailand, Brazil, Mexico) have moved towards decentralized norms on school re-opening

Source: Press search, UNESCO
 Note: CPM = Cases per million DPM = Deaths per million

✔ Wave I ✔ Wave II ● Closing criteria ● Opening criteria¹⁷

Hence, mass closures for key countries have been limited in 2021

Country	% weeks schools were open		
	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary
China	90%+	90%+	90%+
Australia	85-90%	85-90%	85-90%
Japan	85-90%	85-90%	85-90%
South Africa	80-85%	80-85%	80-85%
USA	75-80%	75-80%	75-80%
UK	70-75%	70-75%	70-75%
Portugal	60-65%	60-65%	60-65%
Singapore	55-60%	60-65%	65-70%
Thailand	55-60%	55-60%	55-60%

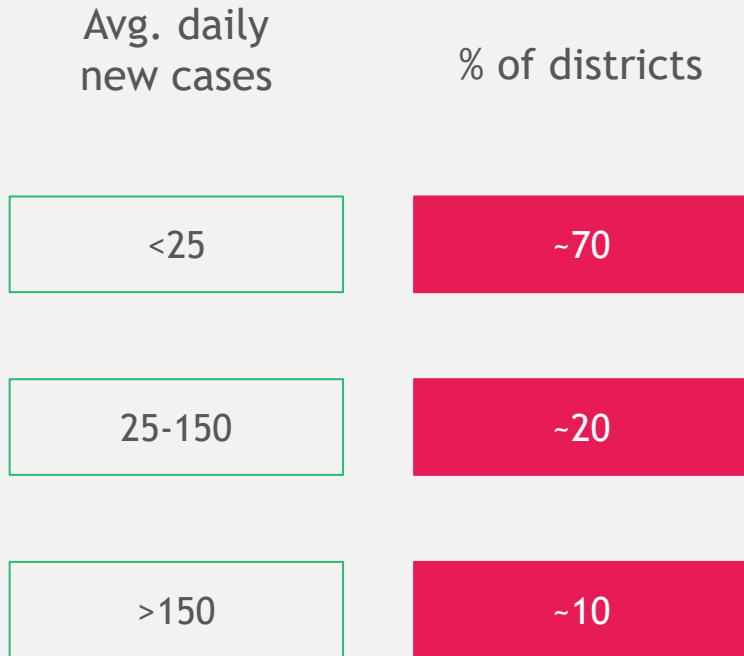
■ <30% wks
 ■ 30-60% wks
 ■ >60% wks

Source: [Covid Education Recovery Tracker](#) for other countries (In-person education, hybrid education, mixed model - are treated as "Schools open"), press search

Note: Data available from 25 Apr to 9 December 2021; dates have been adjusted basis data availability for Thailand till Dec 31, 2021

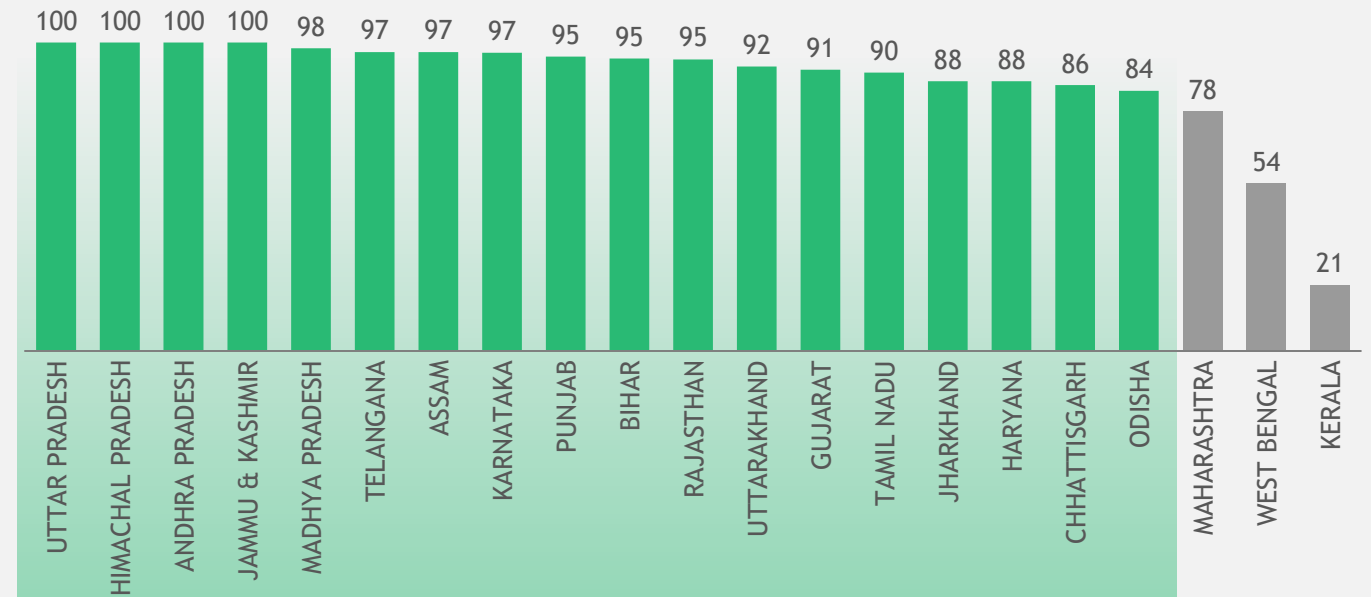
India's continued centralized decision making implies that even in districts with <25 daily cases, schools are shut

~70% of Indian districts have <25 daily new cases



For 18 major states, cases still largely concentrated in select districts

% districts with <150 daily new cases



>80% districts have <150 daily cases

Countries which have re-opened schools have undertaken multiple initiatives to curb transmission (1/2)



Social distancing



Hong Kong: Desks arranged in single rows in 'face-to-back' setting



Nigeria: Entry and dispersal gates separate for primary, secondary and senior school children to avoid crowding at drop and pick-up time



Denmark: Outdoor museums and sports halls used to ensure safe distancing



Masks/
face
shields



Spain: Mandatory face masks in class for children aged six and over



Singapore: Children 12 years and below, who may have difficulty wearing face masks must wear face shields



Testing















UK: All the children have been given rapid antigen test kits that they are required to take at home every Sunday and Wednesday



Germany: All kids must undertake rapid self-tests twice a week in the classroom

Countries which have re-opened schools have undertaken multiple initiatives to curb transmission (2/2)

	Staggering school timings	 <p>Hong Kong: Classes run in 2 shifts (8 am to 12 pm and 12pm to 3 pm)</p>
		 <p>UK: Staggered start, recess and end times (i.e. grades started in staggered manner from 7-9 am)</p>
		 <p>US: Staggered recess times; each class assigned to one 'section' of the playground for a week (on rotation basis)</p>
		 <p>Indonesia: Schools will only operate at 50% capacity, with half of the students remaining at home and studying online</p>
	Forming student pods/ bubbles	 <p>Norway: Classmates divided into cohorts, and do not mix with members of other cohorts</p>
		 <p>Singapore: Children divided into groups of five, and stay in the same group for three weeks</p>
	Vaccination	 <p>US: Booster shots approved for teachers</p>
		 <p>Canada: Ontario fast-tracking COVID-19 booster shots for education and child-care workers</p>
		 <p>UK: In-school COVID-19 vaccination for 12 to 15 year-olds</p>

Critical for India to move to a philosophy of schools being "last to close, first to open" and act on 4 key implications

1



Decentralize school re-opening and closures

- Decentralize decision making to GP/Ward/school level (not national, state or district)
- Define clear norms for school opening and closure - e.g., if post re-opening, a school sees a spike in cases (say if 5% students test positive) then it should be closed for 1 week

2



Offer blended learning construct

- All schools to re-open in offline model
- Schools should continue to provide online classes for cases where parents are uncomfortable sending their child to school

3



Strengthen testing, vaccination, safety protocol and ventilation

- Testing: Supply sufficient rapid antigen testing kits to schools for weekly testing for all children and school staff
- Vaccination: Mandate teacher and staff vaccination; in-school vaccination for 15 to 17 year-olds (gradually for younger children, basis vaccination policy)
- Safety protocol: Clearly define and monitor adherence to protocol for masking, social distancing, staggering timings etc.
- Ventilation: Leverage outdoor spaces, ensure proper ventilation (with open doors, windows etc.)

4



Prepare to bridge learning gaps

- Define a **robust plan to bridge gaps in learning** (including content, social and emotional skills etc.)
- Allocate **sufficient resources to materialize plan**, and build back better over 3-5 years

It will take considerable "mission-mode" focus and resilience planning to build back better

End-to-end ecosystem support needed



Government: Build a robust mid-term (3-5 year) roadmap to bridge learning gap, with adequate infrastructure upgradation and other funding support



Local administrators and school staff: Make education a priority by regularly monitoring in-school preparedness and adherence to protocols



Parents: Trust the system by sending their children to school and encourage children to follow Covid-appropriate behavior

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