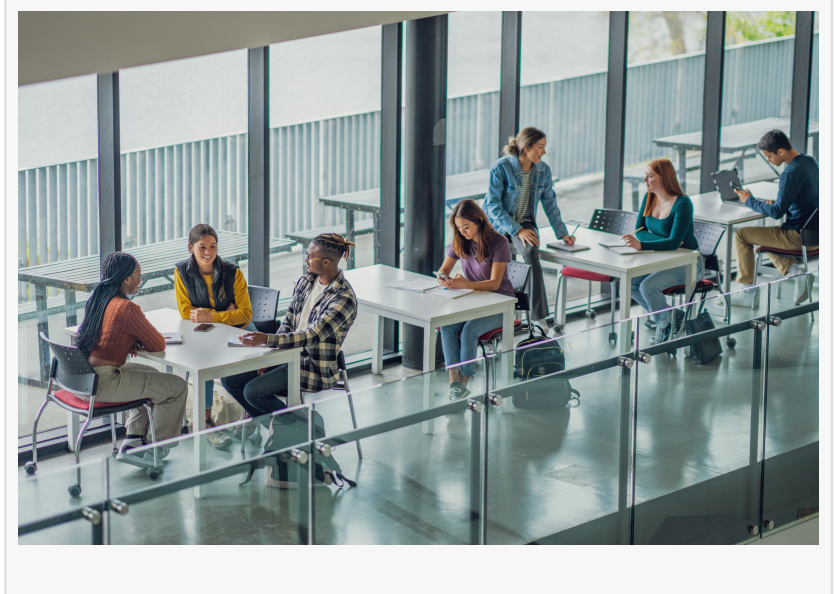


Preparing for a Healthy and Safe Academic Year: Comprehensive Guidelines for Educational Institutions

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA, August 30, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the new academic year approaches and educational institutions prepare to welcome students back to campus, International SOS, the world's leading health and security company, underscores the critical importance of robust measures to ensure a healthy and safe campus environment.

The education sector has navigated a complex landscape of challenges in the past few years, ranging from public health emergencies to heightened security concerns. It is estimated that over 246 million children and adolescents experience school violence every year.* Additionally, approximately 6,000 reported attacks on schools, universities, students and educators took place in 2022 and 2023, a nearly 20% increase compared with the previous two years.** International SOS assistance data reported a 9%



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increase in requests for information and assistance within the education industry in 2023 relative to the year prior. Meanwhile, in just the first half of this year, the firm has already observed a 6% increase in requests, indicating a persistent need for vigilance and adaptive strategies within the sector.***

Dr Rodrigo Rodriguez-Fernandez, Global Health Advisor, Wellness & Mental Health at International SOS, comments,

“Amidst the complexities of the current global health scenario, it is crucial for educational institutions to adopt a

multifaceted approach to campus health, wellbeing and safety. This means not only being

reactive to emerging health risks but also being strategic in cultivating a campus environment conducive to students and staff's physical health and psychological wellbeing. By understanding and pre-empting the changing health risks, institutions can create robust systems that support resilience and adaptability within the campus community.”

Dr Rodrigo adds, “To achieve this, educational institutions must invest in comprehensive health education programmes that empower students, faculty and staff with the knowledge and skills to make informed health decisions. This includes regular health screenings, mental health support services and promoting a culture of wellness through physical activities and healthy eating options.”

In addition to ensuring on-campus health and safety, the education sector must also tackle the risks related to school trips and international programmes. The forthcoming ISO 31031 standard will provide comprehensive guidance for managing these risks, covering both domestic and international travel and addressing the specific vulnerabilities of minors. This standard includes guidelines for creating emergency response plans and ensuring the safety and security of young travellers. By adopting ISO 31031, educational institutions can better safeguard their students during off-campus activities, promoting a safer and more secure learning environment.

Henning Snyman, Security Director at International SOS, comments,

“Educational institutions must proactively address the evolving landscape of campus security risks, especially in light of the rising tide of student activism and campus protests across the globe. As on-campus activities and study abroad programmes resume, staying informed and adapting to new risk environments is crucial. Regular updates to security protocols and training programmes are essential to ensure a safe learning environment. Thorough risk assessments and careful vetting of third-party providers are also key to safeguarding student safety. Institutions must adopt comprehensive security strategies that protect their community in all settings, from campus life to international study programmes. This strategy should include robust physical security measures and the capability to respond swiftly and effectively to any crisis. Cultivating a culture of preparedness, where staff and students are trained to recognise and respond to potential threats, is vital. This proactive approach to security is fundamental to maintaining a secure and resilient learning environment.”

As educational institutions plan their return to campus, International SOS shares key health and safety recommendations:

1. Comprehensive risk assessments and security measures: Conduct thorough risk assessments regularly to identify potential hazards and vulnerabilities on campus and ensure that all areas are safe for students, faculty, and staff.
2. Health guidelines and enhanced hygiene: Collaborate closely with local health authorities and experts to implement comprehensive health guidelines. Promote good hygiene practices through educational campaigns, encouraging regular handwashing, proper respiratory etiquette

and overall personal health awareness.

3. Emergency preparedness and response training: Provide ongoing training for staff and students on emergency response procedures, including fire drills, lockdown protocols, and first aid, to ensure everyone is prepared for any situation. Establish clear emergency response plans, ensuring everyone knows the correct actions to take in case of health crises or other emergencies.
4. Mental health support: Offer mental health support and counselling services and resources to address the challenges that may arise during the return to campus life. Regularly communicate to students, faculty and staff about the support available and how to access it.
5. Develop a comprehensive safety plan: Institutions should create a detailed safety plan that includes protocols for various scenarios, such as natural disasters, health emergencies, and security threats. This plan should be regularly updated and communicated to all staff and students.
6. Foster a safe and inclusive environment: Addressing bullying and violence through educational programmes and strict anti-bullying policies can create a safer school environment. Promoting inclusivity and respect among students and staff is key to fostering a positive campus culture.

* Plan International estimates that at least 246 million boys and girls suffer from school violence every year. This is based on the following calculation: the 2006 UN Study on Violence against Children reported that 20-65% of schoolchildren are affected by verbal bullying, the most prevalent form of violence in schools. Based on UNESCO's 2011 Global Education Digest report, 1.23 billion children are in primary or secondary school on any given day, so 20% of the global student population is 246 million children. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011). Global Education Digest 2011: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World.

** Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack | Education Under Attack 2024

*** International SOS Assistance Tracker (January 2022 – June 2024)

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