

Finland to reopen schools and daycares gradually starting May 14^[1]

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EXCERPTS

HELSINKI — Finland will reopen schools and daycare centers after May 13, having kept them mostly closed since March 18 due to the coronavirus pandemic, the government said on Wednesday.

Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin said children would return to school gradually, starting on May 14 for a little more than two weeks, before their summer break begins as usual at the start of June.

Pupils at upper secondary and vocational schools will continue to study remotely, she added.

The spread of the coronavirus has showed signs of slowing in Finland, with the number of cases per capita well below those of neighboring Sweden, Norway and Estonia.

Education Minister Li Andersson said there were no longer grounds for keeping the schools and daycares closed.

"It is clear that a long period of remote teaching may have negative impacts on children's learning and wellbeing," Andersson told a news conference.

By Wednesday, 206 people had died in Finland and it had 4,906 confirmed coronavirus cases.

The Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare said some 200 cases of infection had been found in children under 16 years old in Finland but none of them had been hospitalized.

The institute's Director of Health Security Mika Salminen said more evidence had emerged during the school closure to prove that children played a very small role in spreading the virus.

"Also children don't generally infect adults," Salminen said in reference to the coronavirus, adding there was little evidence of such cases.

(Reporting by Anne Kauranen; Editing by Alex Richardson, Chris Reese and Emelia Sithole-Matarise)

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