



Guidance for Managing High Temperatures in Schools

Practical actions for school leaders, site teams, health and safety representatives, and staff during hot weather and heatwaves.

Purpose

This guidance sets out proportionate steps schools should take to reduce health and safety risks during periods of high temperature. It is intended to support local hot weather plans, risk assessments, and discussions with staff and recognised trade union representatives.

Key principles

- There is no fixed legal maximum temperature for schools or workplaces, but employers must ensure temperatures are reasonable and that risks from heat are properly assessed and controlled.
- High temperatures should be treated as a health and safety hazard, with temporary and seasonal controls put in place where needed.
- Children, younger pupils, pupils with medical conditions, those taking certain medicines, pregnant staff, older staff, disabled staff, and anyone doing physically demanding work may be at greater risk.
- Schools should normally remain open where risks can be managed safely, but leaders must take all necessary steps to keep pupils and staff safe and comfortable.

Before hot weather

- Review the school's adverse weather or heatwave risk assessment before the summer term and whenever a heat-health alert is issued.
- Identify hotter parts of the site, including top-floor classrooms, rooms with large south- or west-facing windows, sports halls, kitchens, playgrounds, and temporary buildings.
- Agree clear triggers for additional controls, such as forecast temperatures, heat-health alerts, high indoor readings, or reports of discomfort.
- Check that thermometers, water supplies, blinds, curtains, ventilation, fans, shaded areas, first aid arrangements, and communication routes are available and working.

- Plan reasonable adjustments for vulnerable pupils and staff, including access to cooler rooms, additional breaks, hydration, modified duties, or amended timetables.

Managing classrooms and indoor areas

- Open windows and doors early in the morning, and overnight where safe, secure, and permitted, to release stored heat.
- Use cross-ventilation where possible by opening classroom doors as well as windows, while maintaining safeguarding and fire safety requirements.
- Close windows, curtains, or blinds when the outside air becomes hotter than the air indoors, provided adequate ventilation can still be maintained.
- Keep electric lighting and heat-generating equipment to a minimum; switch off devices rather than leaving them on standby.
- Move classes to cooler rooms or shaded areas where practicable, especially during the hottest part of the day.
- Use fans to improve air movement where temperatures are below 35°C. Above 35°C, fans may not prevent heat-related illness and may worsen dehydration, so additional controls should be considered.

Practical steps when temperatures exceed 30°C

When indoor or outdoor temperatures exceed 30°C, schools should treat this as a trigger for enhanced controls. The focus should be on reducing heat exposure, lowering physical demand, increasing hydration, and protecting vulnerable pupils and staff.

- Take temperature readings in the hottest classrooms and work areas, record the readings, and repeat checks during the day, especially between late morning and mid-afternoon.
- Move pupils and staff away from rooms that remain excessively hot, prioritising cooler rooms, shaded spaces, libraries, halls, ground-floor rooms, or rooms with better ventilation.
- Pause or significantly reduce strenuous PE, playground games, outdoor learning, site work, cleaning tasks, and manual handling during the hottest part of the day.
- Introduce additional short drink breaks and remind pupils and staff to drink water regularly, even if they do not feel thirsty.
- Relax uniform and dress code requirements for pupils and staff immediately, including blazers, jumpers, ties, heavy footwear requirements where appropriate, and any clothing that increases heat stress.
- Provide additional shaded or cooler supervision points for break and lunch periods, and rotate staff so no one is exposed to heat for extended periods.

- Check directly on vulnerable pupils and staff, including those with health conditions, pregnant staff, disabled pupils or staff, younger children, and anyone reporting discomfort.
- Use fans only where they improve comfort and do not create additional risks; ensure trailing leads are managed safely and fans are not used as the only control in very hot rooms.
- In the absence of any fixed air conditioning units consider purchasing portable air condition units whilst experiencing periods of extreme heat.
- Consider temporary timetable changes, earlier indoor breaks, reduced lesson intensity, amended duties, or shorter outdoor periods where this would reduce risk.
- Escalate concerns to the headteacher, trust, local authority, employer, or responsible body if temperatures remain unsafe or controls are not sufficient.

Outdoor activities, PE, and breaktimes

- Avoid vigorous physical activity on very hot days. Substitute lower-intensity activities, move lessons indoors, or reschedule PE and sports events to cooler times.
- Use shaded areas for breaks and outdoor learning wherever possible.
- Encourage pupils to wear loose, light-coloured clothing and suitable sunhats outdoors. Schools should consider relaxing uniform rules, including removing blazers, jumpers, ties, or other restrictive clothing.
- Encourage high-factor sunscreen, particularly for prolonged outdoor activities, while recognising that parents and carers may need to provide it depending on school policy.
- Ensure staff supervising outdoor areas have access to water, shade, and breaks.

Hydration and welfare

- Provide and promote regular access to drinking water throughout the day.
- Allow pupils and staff to refill water bottles and drink more frequently than usual.
- Build in rest breaks for staff working in hot areas, supervising outdoors, or carrying out physical tasks.
- Remind staff to report concerns early, including headaches, dizziness, nausea, unusual tiredness, faintness, or signs of dehydration.
- Ensure first aiders and pastoral staff know how to respond to heat stress, heat exhaustion, and suspected heatstroke.

Recognising heat-related illness

Condition	Possible signs	Immediate action
Heat stress	Discomfort, irritability, reduced concentration, unusual behaviour, thirst, dark urine, or dry nappies in younger children.	Move to a cooler place, encourage fluids, reduce activity, and monitor closely.
Heat exhaustion	Headache, dizziness, tiredness, nausea, vomiting, heavy sweating, clammy skin, muscle cramps, or faintness.	Move to a cool area, loosen clothing, cool the person with water or cool packs, give water if fully alert, and seek medical advice if symptoms continue.
Heatstroke	Confusion, collapse, seizure, very high temperature, hot dry skin or excessive sweating, rapid heartbeat, or reduced consciousness.	Call 999 immediately. Start rapid cooling while waiting for emergency help.

Actions for employers and school leaders

- Consult staff and recognised trade union representatives on heat risks and practical controls.
- Record temperature concerns, actions taken, and any incidents of heat-related illness.
- Review risk assessments after any incident, complaint, or period of extreme heat.
- Consider temporary changes to start and finish times, duties, room allocation, break arrangements, and supervision rotas where this would reduce risk.
- Communicate clearly with parents and carers about water bottles, sunscreen, hats, uniform changes, and any changes to activities or the school day.
- Escalate unresolved building-related concerns to the employer, trust, local authority, or responsible body.

Quick checklist

- Hot weather risk assessment reviewed.
- Weather alerts and local forecasts monitored.
- Cooler rooms and shaded areas identified.
- Ventilation, blinds, curtains, fans, and water supplies checked.
- Uniform and activity adjustments agreed and communicated.
- Vulnerable pupils and staff identified and supported.

- Staff briefed on symptoms and emergency response.
- Concerns, temperatures, incidents, and actions recorded.