



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE, DOCUMENT

Opening schools as well as childcare and play settings in extreme bad weather and extreme hot weather

Guidance for headteachers as well as childcare and play providers about what to consider during extreme bad weather and periods of extreme hot weather.

First published: 14 December 2022

Last updated: 28 September 2023

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Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to provide headteachers and childcare and play providers with advice about the issues to consider when deciding whether a school or setting should close or stay open during extreme bad weather and what additional safety precautions should be implemented during periods of extreme hot weather.

During extreme bad weather, such as flooding, storms and snow, or during extreme hot weather, the Welsh Government's default position is that schools and childcare and play settings should be kept open for as many children, learners, or students as possible. However, it might be necessary to close temporarily due to inaccessibility or risk of injury.

An overview of the legal standpoints that should be considered when making a dynamic assessment and decision are included within this guidance. An explanation of the term 'dynamic' is also included in the opening settings in extreme bad weather section.

However, this guidance should not be considered a substitute for seeking your own legal advice from the local authority or other qualified person.

The guidance is split into sections to cover issues relevant to opening and keeping schools and childcare and play settings open in extreme bad weather, in addition to considerations and mitigating measures required in schools and settings during periods of extreme hot weather.

Guidance and considerations for both extreme bad weather and extreme hot weather are provided in [Annex A](#).

[Annex B](#) and [Annex C](#) provide generic risk assessments that headteachers and childcare and play providers can adapt to suit every school and setting's

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circumstance. This material provides leaders with a detailed awareness of the potential hazards, as well as a general risk assessment template for recording the specific details that will have informed a decision to close or open an individual school or setting. Anyone using these should consult with the school or setting's insurer to ascertain the insurer's requirements as to a risk analysis. Governing bodies and voluntary committees should also take an insurer's requirements into account if setting a policy or guidelines for the school or setting.

Opening or closing a school or setting in extreme bad weather

Assessing the risks

The decision to open or close a school or a childcare or play setting during extreme bad weather is dependent on the headteacher or childcare and play provider undertaking a dynamic risk assessment.

'Dynamic' means that the risk assessment should be updated as often as weather conditions or circumstances change. This assessment would not necessarily be written down but it would be thought out using the criteria in [Annex A](#).

The timing in which a dynamic risk assessment is required to determine closure or opening is quite limited, hence the need for it to be thought out rather than written down. However, being aware of the generic risk assessment and its related parts would enable the headteacher or childcare and play provider to create their own general risk assessment. Both, or the latter, should be able to assist in making the right decision on the day.

Temporarily closing schools in extreme bad weather

Where schools are temporarily closed during extreme bad weather, consideration should be given to providing remote education for the duration of the closure in line with the [Welsh Government's learning continuity guidance](#).

Providing remote education does not change the need to remain open or to reopen as soon as possible provided it is safe to do so.

Childcare or play settings are not expected to offer remote provision.

Web-links to further health and safety guidance and useful websites are provided in this guidance.

Reopening

It is important to reopen as soon as possible provided it is safe to do so.

[Public Health Wales provide further advice on extreme weather events.](#)

Getting extra support

If extreme bad weather, for example flooding, has significantly impacted a school or childcare and play setting and additional support is required, local authorities will be able to provide assistance to get the school or setting reopened as quickly and safely as possible.

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Extreme hot weather

Schools as well as childcare and play settings will have plans in place to deal with weather extremes including managing warm or extreme hot weather. We know that children's susceptibility to high temperatures varies. Among the groups known to be at increased risk of adverse effects due to extreme hot weather are:

- those who are overweight
- those who are taking medication
- some children with disabilities or complex health needs
- children aged under 4

Steps to keep children and young people safe

All schools and settings should ensure they take the necessary steps to keep children and young people safe, both indoors and outdoors.

On extremely hot days we would advise schools and settings to:

- avoid vigorous physical activity
- maximise shade, restricting time exposed to the sun during outdoor activities
- maximise hydration, ensuring that water bottles are regularly refilled
- maximise ventilation, opening windows and other ventilation openings during the cool of early morning and not closing them but reducing their openings when the outdoor air becomes warmer than the air indoors
- use outdoor awnings, sun covers, or indoor blinds where available
- prevent any additional heat being generated by keeping the use of electric lighting and all electrical equipment, including computers, monitors and printers, to a minimum and switching them off when not in use rather than leaving them in 'standby mode'

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Additional, mitigating actions, which can be taken include:

- asking parents or carers to ensure that their children attend wearing loose, light coloured clothing if possible
- ensuring that hats and suncream are worn outdoors

Further downloadable [advice on extreme hot weather is available from Public Health Wales](#) for the general public and for those looking after children.

Heat exhaustion and heat-stroke

Schools as well as childcare and play settings should ensure they are familiar with the signs of heat exhaustion and heat-stroke, as well as the steps to take should anyone in their learning community, including those working remotely, show signs of heat exhaustion or heat-stroke.

[Further guidance on this can be found on the NHS website.](#)

Heat-stroke should always be treated as an emergency.

Additional safety measures

In extreme circumstances, local authorities can decide what additional safety measures can be implemented within schools based on their own local assessment of the risk.

Local authority directors of education should be aware of the warnings and advice in place and should share this information with schools.

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Relevant laws and duties

Opening and closing schools in extreme bad weather

In line with the School Government (Terms of Reference) (Wales) Regulations 2000 the headteacher is responsible for the internal organisation, management, and control of the school premises.

Decisions to open or close schools or settings in extreme bad weather fall to the headteacher, although the headteacher or manager may choose to consult with the local authority and chair of governors for advice before taking a decision.

The logic for this policy is that the headteacher is the senior manager on the spot and so is the most suitable person to take a decision, being better placed than a remote decision maker.

Local authorities have powers to close schools by virtue of the Control of School Premises Regulations 2008 and section 29(5) of the Education Act 2002. Authorities may direct schools (except foundation, foundation special schools and voluntary aided schools) to close on safety grounds. This direction overrides the opinion of the headteacher. However, local authorities cannot require any schools to stay open or to open.

Local authorities are not allowed to direct foundation, foundation special schools or voluntary aided schools to close. However all schools must comply with and implement the governing body's policies on health and safety. It is a duty of the governing body to carry out a risk assessment and to set up arrangements to manage health and safety in such schools. In respect of community and voluntary controlled schools the local authority is responsible for doing this.

Childcare settings will need to make their own decisions as to whether they open or close. However, the Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations 2010

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makes clear the provider must ensure that unnecessary risks are identified and as far as possible eliminated. Childcare and play settings are expected to undertake risk assessments to support decision making. Decisions made as a result of the risk assessment should be clearly communicated to staff and families.

Temperature of buildings

With regard to the temperature of a school building, in line with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (Circular 15/99), the different parts of the building must be kept to the following temperatures where the external temperature is -1°C :

- in an area where there is lower than normal level of physical activity (for example a sick room) a temperature of 21°C should be maintained
- in a classroom where there is the normal level of physical activity associated with teaching, private study, or examinations a temperature of 18°C should be maintained
- in an area where there is a higher level than normal of physical activity (for example a school gym) a temperature of 15°C should be maintained

Within childcare settings, Standard 22: Environment of the 'National Minimum Standards for Childcare for children up to the age of 12 years' notes a requirement that:

“ Rooms are maintained at a temperature of at least 18 degrees Centigrade (65 degrees Fahrenheit). ”

Missed sessions

Consideration should also be given to the Education (School Day and School Year) (Wales) Regulations 2003:

“ 4. (3) Where at any time a school is prevented from meeting for one or more sessions for which it was intended, that it should meet, and it is not reasonably practicable for arrangements to be made for it to meet at an alternative time for those sessions, the school is to be treated for the purposes of paragraph (2) as if it had met as intended. ”

Duty of care

Teachers and other staff in schools look after their learners in place of the parent or carer (in loco parentis). This means that while learners are in their control and care, teachers and other staff are under a legal obligation to treat and take such care of them as a careful parent or carer would.

This duty clearly applies where learners are on school premises. The duty will also apply when learners are travelling to and from a school on a school bus.

In the case where children and young people are travelling to and from a school or setting on public transport), then there is no obvious reason why that duty should apply. However, much may depend on the particular circumstances. For example, if the school were to provide 'bus escorts' on an ordinary bus service then a court may regard that as indicative of the fact that the local authority and/or the school have accepted responsibility for the care of learners on that bus. The duty will also apply when learners are attending a school or setting trip away from school or setting premises.

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Childcare and play providers have to meet legislative requirements to ensure the safety and well-being of any children in their care this includes not only when they are on the childcare premises but also when they are on any outings away from the setting, and on any transport being provided by the setting.

Related documents

Further information on health and safety issues, including educational visits guidance, may be found on the [Health and Safety Executive's website](#).

Other helpful web-links include the following:

- [Learning continuity guidance](#)
- [Emergency planning and response guidance for education and childcare settings](#)
- Public Health Wales: [extreme weather events](#)
- [The Met Office](#)
- [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#)
- [The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents \(RoSPA\)](#)
- [Natural Resources Wales](#)

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