

# Hot Weather in Schools

As climate change drives increasingly frequent and intense heatwaves across the UK, schools face a growing responsibility to protect children from the health risks posed by extreme temperatures. Children are particularly vulnerable to heat-related illnesses such as dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke due to their developing physiology and high activity levels. Recent data shows that the number of 'very hot' days in England has more than tripled. Adaptability is essential in responding to rising temperatures. Schools must be flexible in their approach to timetables, uniforms, outdoor activities, and classroom environments to ensure children remain safe and comfortable. When pupils are dehydrated, overheated, or suffering from sunburn, their ability to concentrate, retain information, and engage meaningfully in learning is significantly compromised. By prioritising strategies — such as shaded play areas, access to water, and cool indoor spaces — schools can safeguard both the health and educational outcomes of their students.

## Did you know?

- That the 'Once a day' claims by suncream manufacturers is banned in other countries as it gives a false sense of security. The majority of people miss parts of the body and do not apply sun cream correctly so reapplication is essential. 'Once a day' suncreams are therefore not a solution to sun protection during the school day. The British Skin Foundation has lots of guidance on [Sun Safety](#).
- It is important to protect the eyes as well as our skin. In the short-term exposure to UV rays and bright sunlight can cause eye strain, headaches, dry eyes and blurry vision. In the long term leaving eyes unprotected can cause cataracts, macular degeneration (which can lead to blindness) and skin cancer around the eyes.
- Some of the groups at increased levels of risk during hot weather include: reception age children and younger, anyone with a preexisting health condition, pregnant women, people who are physically active and spend a lot of time outside and people with learning difficulties.
- People on certain medications – some of these are widely used and include antihistamines, antidepressants, anticholinergics<sup>1</sup>, antiepileptics<sup>2</sup>, antipsychotics and blood pressure medication, including diuretics and beta blockers are at increased risk of heat harms.
- Air quality also worsens in hot weather which makes anyone with a respiratory illness such as asthma more vulnerable.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Anticholinergic medications are used to treat conditions related to the bladder (such as incontinence), the digestive system (such as irritable bowel syndrome), the brain (such as Parkinson's disease) and the lungs (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)." (Mehrhof and Bunn, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Anti-seizure medication

- Sunburn once every two years can triple the risk of developing melanoma, compared to never getting burnt (Cancer Research UK, 2023). Skin cancer is preventable in approximately **9 out of 10 cases**.

The information below provides some indicators of considerations you could make with regards to keeping children and staff safe during periods of hot weather.

## Preparing For Hot Weather

- The Met Office heat alerts provide early warning of periods of heat waves: [Met Office – Heat Health Alerts](#)
- Develop or revise your hot weather plan. Please list actions that will be taken in warm weather periods. Please consider risks across different school spaces e.g. playgrounds, classrooms, sports halls, and consider the needs of vulnerable pupils.
- Make sure staff know how to recognise and what to do if anyone becomes ill from heat related illness. UKHSA guidance [Looking after children during hot weather](#) is a useful resource.
- Prepare classrooms by cooling them by opening windows early, then closing and shading them during peak heat.
- Seek to improve shade available within outdoor spaces.
- Consider having a plan in place to
- Schools should consider relaxing uniform rules during hot weather to make sure pupils are comfortable. Clear communication with parents and students is key – make sure everyone knows they're allowed to adapt their clothing for the heat. Some children may insist on still wearing blazers in very hot weather if they are anxious about getting in trouble.
- There are lots of resources for schools and an accreditation programme available on the [Skin website](#).

## Heat Generating Activities

Avoid heat-generating activities during periods of hot weather: This includes use of:

- computer monitors
- printers
- Bunsen burners
- ovens
- design and technology equipment

Similarly, turning electrical equipment, including lights, off instead of leaving it on standby will reduce heat output.

## During hot weather

- Children should wear loose, light-coloured clothing to help keep cool and sunhats with wide brims. When outdoors, encourage children to stay in the shade as much as possible.
- Sunscreen with high sun protection factors should be used to protect skin. **Give time for reapplication of sun cream before breaks.** Suncream should be reapplied every two hours. Parents can only ensure that suncream is applied before children arrive at school.
- Teachers should also encourage children to take off their blazers and jumpers.
- Encourage children and staff to wear sunglasses with UV protection to protect eyes from damage.
- Ensure children have good access to water all day. Consider relaxing toilet rules so children can use them during lessons and do not have to worry about drinking 'too much'. It is important that nobody becomes dehydrated at school.
- Avoid vigorous physical activity on hot weather days, especially between 11 and 3 when it is the hottest. Ideally move it to the morning or schedule swimming for the summer term. Alternatively do pilates or yoga as the warm weather can allow for a greater range of flexibility and for students to practice deeper stretches.

## Good to remember

- Everyone is likely to be more tired during hot weather.
- You will not know which students are at increased risk of adverse effects from heat. It is important therefore to make sure that all children are protected from dehydration, overheating and sunburns.

## Further Resources

- Sun education initiative in Kent for sun safety: [Skin cancer: Primary school sun safety lessons trialled - BBC News](#) Learning how to check UV levels, apply sunscreen properly, and understand when they need protection.
- Sun Safe Schools and Nursery Programme. [Sun Safe Schools Accreditation from Skcin](#) and [Sun Safe Nurseries from Skcin](#)