

Guidance for schools and early years settings during Heat Waves – Summer 2024

Why is this important?

Children cannot control their body temperature as efficiently as adults during hot weather. Children under 4 years of age, those who are overweight or who are taking medication may be at increased risk of adverse effects. Some children with disabilities or complex health needs may be more susceptible to temperature extremes.

What are the signs to look out for?

Heat-related illness can range from mild heat stress to potentially life-threatening heatstroke, which needs to be treated as an emergency.

Heat exhaustion

Symptoms of heat exhaustion vary but include one or more of the following:

- tiredness
- dizziness
- headache
- nausea/vomiting
- excessive sweating
- pale and clammy skin
- confusion

Heatstroke

Symptoms of heat stroke may include:

- high body temperature – a temperature of or above 40°C (104°F) is a major sign of heatstroke
- red, hot skin and sweating that then suddenly stops
- fast heartbeat
- fast shallow breathing
- confusion/lack of coordination
- fits
- loss of consciousness

What actions to take to protect children suffering from heat-related illness?

The following steps to reduce body temperature should be taken immediately:

1. Move the child to as cool a room as possible and encourage them to drink cool water (such as water from a cold tap).
2. Cool the child as rapidly as possible, using whatever methods you can. For example, sponge or spray the child with cool (25 to 30°C) water – if available, place cold packs around the neck and armpits, or wrap the child in a cool, wet sheet and assist cooling with a fan.
3. Dial 999 to request an ambulance if the person doesn't respond to the above treatment within 30 minutes.

The symptoms are often the same in adults and children, although children may become floppy and sleepy.

If a child or adult has heatstroke, loses consciousness, or has a fit, place them in the recovery position, call 999 immediately and follow the steps above until medical assistance arrives.

Protecting children outdoors

- on very hot days (that is, where temperatures are in excess of 30°C) children should not take part in vigorous physical activity
- children playing outdoors should be encouraged to stay in the shade as much as possible
- loose, light-coloured clothing should be worn to help children keep cool and hats of a closed construction with wide brims should be worn to avoid sunburn
- thin clothing or sun cream should be used to protect skin if children are playing or taking lessons outdoors for more than 20 minutes

Protecting children indoors

- Windows: open windows when the air is cooler outside but keep ajar only and cover windows (using blinds or curtains) during the heat of the day – especially when the sun is shining on them.
 - settings with children aged under 5 years should take extra precautions when opening windows and balconies to prevent any accidental falls. Please download the [Free from falls flyer \(PDF\)](#) for more information or visit the [Child Accident Prevention Trust website](#)
 - Make sure there is adequate ventilation
- keep the use of electric lighting to a minimum during heatwaves
- all electrical equipment should be switched off when not in use and should not be left in 'standby mode'
- if possible, use those classrooms or other spaces which are less likely to overheat, and adjust the layout of teaching spaces to avoid direct sunlight on children oscillating mechanical fans can be used to increase air movement if temperatures are below 35°C – at temperatures above 35°C fans may not prevent heat-related illness and may worsen dehydration
- if necessary, consider rearranging school start, finish, and play times to avoid teaching during very hot conditions
- encourage children to eat normally

Where can I find further information?

- UKHSA guidance Looking after children and those in early years settings during heatwaves: for teachers and professionals.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hot-weather-and-health-supporting-vulnerable-people/looking-after-children-and-those-in-early-years-settings-during-heatwaves-for-teachers-and-professionals>
- UK Health Security Agency's (UKHSA) Heatwave Plan for England.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/heatwave-plan-for-england>
- Beat the Heat – Staying safe in hot weather -
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beat-the-heat-hot-weather-advice/beat-the-heat-staying-safe-in-hot-weather#exhaustion>