

## Practical guidance during the winter months

### Cold weather guidance

Over recent winters we have experienced some harsh conditions over the winter period, therefore it is important to remember how to protect your staff and property.

Indoor thermal comfort may also be of concern to staff and students during winter. The normal maintained operative temperatures within schools during the heating season range from:

- 17° for areas where there is a higher than normal level of physical activity (sports halls); sleeping accommodation and toilets; circulation spaces and store rooms that are normally occupied
- 18°C for teaching areas/classrooms
- 20°C for kitchen preparation areas and spaces with normal levels of activity (teaching, study, exams, administration, staff areas, prep rooms, practical spaces and computer suites)
- 21°C for spaces with less than normal level of activity or clothing, including sick rooms, isolation rooms, changing rooms and gymnasias and dance and movement studios
- 23°C where pupils or adults may be wet and partially clothed for a significant length of time, such as swimming pools

Considerations also must be made for young children under five years old, and special schools, where pupils tend to have complex and varied needs, including pupils with physical difficulties or profound and multiple additional needs.

Some simple ways you can ensure thermal comfort in cold weather. You can help ensure thermal comfort in cold weather by:

- providing adequate heating in the workplace or local heating such as temporary heaters.
- reducing exposure to the cold by separating cold products or cold areas from areas where people are working.
- reducing draughts.
- providing or wearing the appropriate type of protective clothing.
- introducing work systems to limit exposure to a cold environment, for example by keeping the heating systems running overnight; introducing later start times to allow the daytime temperature to rise; and
- allowing sufficient breaks to enable employees to get hot drinks or to warm up in heated areas.

As for hot conditions, staff and students concerned about cold conditions should raise the matter with their headteacher.

### Emergency closures/weather alerts

There is in place procedures to follow should an emergency closure of your school be necessary due to severe weather. During severe weather, weather alerts will be posted daily on Ealing Grid for Learning.

### Protecting your property - internal and external

Extreme cold conditions can lead to burst pipes and subsequent water damage in school properties. Although the resulting damage in such cases is covered by the schools and Councils Property Insurance, the time spent in dealing with the incident, together with any related claim will not be.

A claim for extensive water damage can mean that the repairs and the claim are on-going for many months. The simplest solution is to do what you can to prevent an incident occurring in the first place and also to look for ways to minimise the damage if something was to happen.

### Practical guidance

- Have plenty of salt and sand on site and scatter sand and salt mixtures on snow, sleet or ice in busy areas
- When the weather improves, sweep up the mixture and dry the doormats
- Consider restricting access to non-essential areas during severe weather
- Put up temporary signs about the restrictions
- Wet and slippery indoor areas, especially entrances, should be mopped regularly
- Each school should have a bad weather plan with these main points:
  - Have plenty of bottled drinking water, in case drinking water pipes freeze
  - Make sure your electricity supply can cope with extra heating and other needs
  - Be able to provide hot drinks and food if the kitchen is out of action
  - Know where all gas, water and electricity shut-off points are
  - Contact the school support surveyor for help with preparations
  - Have clear written procedures for closing the school and informing parents and pupils/students
  - Have clear written procedures to protect the welfare and health of everyone likely to be in school, for example, schools may wish to tell all parents that children with flu should not attend school
  - Have cover arrangements for staff shortages
  - Set up emergency communications with parents (phone numbers, emails, website news, notice boards, and so on)
  - Arrange funding/budgeting for increased costs such as food, fuel, transport and supply staff.

### Gritting/Salting

It is a popular misconception that an occupier cannot be held liable for failing to clear snow/ice, but can be held liable once an attempt at clearance has been made and then someone injured. The true position is that an occupier can be held liable for 'failing to act reasonably' in order to prevent accidents.

There are several areas of legislation where it is pointed out a duty of care is owed to the employees, pupils and visitors (lawful or unlawful) including:

- Health & Safety at Work Act
- Workplace Regulations
- Occupiers Liability Act

It is important that access to school sites and buildings is safe for staff, pupils and visitors and adequate arrangements are made to ensure risks from snow

and ice are minimised. It is recognised it is not possible to remove immediately every piece of snow and ice - so we must prove whatever we decide to do is reasonable and practicable.

The key to defending slipping on snow/ice claims is to prove that you have a system in place and that you follow your procedures/policies. The courts would require documentation to prove the following points before deciding if a school had been negligent:

- a snow/ice/gritting policy in place at the time of the incident
- the policy is reasonable/practicable
- the policy is communicated to staff and other relevant site users
- the procedures set out in the policy were adhered to

Winter gritting of car parks and paths can be time consuming and a resource issue. This is where risk assessment comes into place by prioritising actions based on the nature, frequency etc. of the hazards identified.

Your risk assessment should consider, main routes, pathways etc. Control measures should consider communications to members of staff and to visitors who will come onto the site, limiting access to some areas in severe weather etc.

Some measures can include: using Met Office data – to anticipate the impact of bad weather. This means that salting can be done in advance of a bad frost and also you only salt when you need to – potentially saving time and resource over the course of a winter.

Finally, don't forget the need to demonstrate that you've taken reasonable steps. Bad weather is above all unpredictable. Even if you significantly reduce the risks, an accident is still possible. To effectively pre-empt legal challenges and insurance claims, documenting any action you do take is important.

Headteachers for schools should ensure adequate risk assessments have been carried out and the control measures identified are in place prior to the winter season. The control measures may include:

- the adequate provision/storage of de-icing salt as appropriate
- identifying those who would carry out the salting activity
- ensuring adequate training has been provided including manual handling
- producing a gritting plan to prioritise which areas will be treated and brought to the attention of all those concerned

There is no simple answer to the gritting questions. Each school will have different needs and therefore require individual risk assessments.

## **Vehicle maintenance**

If you are using a vehicle in cold/icy conditions, it is important that you consider the following:

- Follow national guidance - only set out if your journey is absolutely necessary. Please note that where the local authority has advised schools (based on Government's advice) not to travel, the cancellation cost may be covered by your school's trip insurance.
- If you must travel, make sure you have certain items in the vehicle, e.g. shovel, de-icer, warm clothing and blankets, food, hot drinks and a fully charged mobile phone.
- Adapt your driving style to the conditions. Be smooth and gentle with steering and brakes and allow much longer braking distances than you would normally. Always try and use the highest possible gear to avoid sudden acceleration on icy roads or in snow conditions. Do not attempt to drive through expanses of water.
- When warming your vehicle up - don't leave it unattended with the keys in the ignition - there is no cover for this on any Motor insurance policy.
- Have your Antifreeze checked in the Autumn to ensure that you avoid engine damage caused by frozen cooling systems, check your car handbook to ensure you use the right type of fluid as there are different types required for certain engines.
- Ensure that windscreens and all windows are defrosted and clear before driving.
- Check that wipers are not frozen to screens and water jets are not frozen before being used. To do so may blow a fuse or damage the wiper motor and blades. Use 'All Season' or 'Winter Screen wash'.
- For vehicles equipped with Air conditioning or Climate control the quickest way to demist or defrost the vehicle is to put the system on re-circulation, maximum heat and run for 5 minutes.
- If your battery is sluggish in autumn, get it checked as frosty weather can reduce the battery efficiency by 30%.

## **Public transport**

For pupils using public transport, TfL would publish guidance at: <https://tfl.gov.uk/tube-dlr-overground/status/> Additionally guidance will be published on Ealing Grid for Learning for issues arising as a result of severe weather and emergencies.

## **School meals**

In the event of severe weather, causing disruption to the school meals service, either by catering staff not being able to attend work, or the school being partly or totally closed. You should notify or contact the relevant Catering Area Manager directly.

If catering staff are unable to attend work, alternative arrangements will be put in place to ensure that a hot meal is provided for all children attending school that day. Please do not ask parents to provide a packed lunch unless you have been advised by the Local Authority that it will not be possible to provide a meal.

Any queries about the school meals service please call either your Catering Area Manager or the Property Services Unit.

## **Covid-19/ Winter Wellness**

There are still measures which can be taken to reduce the risk of catching and spreading Covid-19, flu and other winter ailments.

- Getting vaccinated
- Let fresh air into buildings
- Regular hand washing

Here is updated advice on [Health matters: cold weather and COVID-19](#) - GOV.UK

## **Business continuity**

To reduce the impact of adverse weather conditions we recommend you consider taking the following steps:

- Review your emergency response and business recovery plan.

- Think about how you will communicate with your staff in the event of an out-of-hours incident where, for example, you do not want people to attend a site on the following working day.
- Consider how you might deal with staff who become stranded at work.
- Give early warnings of any problems to your customers and suppliers.
- Make sure you have up to date contact details for all staff.
- List the telephone numbers of the people you may need to contact for assistance, e.g., Insurance team, Schools Property, Ealing FM and the Schools Premises Services contractor etc.
- Make sure that only essential business travel continues between sites.
- Wherever appropriate provide regular updates to staff and any other impacted stakeholders

HSE cold weather guidance [Temperature \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/coldweatherguidance/)

Cold weather plan for England - [Cold weather plan for England - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672122/cold-weather-plan-for-england-2019.pdf)

### Helpful links for weather monitoring

- Met Office website - [Weather and climate change - Met Office](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/)
- BBC weather website - [London - BBC Weather](https://www.bbc.com/weather/london)

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- [Neutral](#)
- [No](#)

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