

Respond to student needs and manage safeguarding in hot weather



“Me and my sister were suffering, we shared a room with bunk beds, so I was at the highest point in the house on the top bunk. So it was even more warm for me at that highest point. Because we had the door open for a breeze we could also hear everything my mum was watching on tv so that also stopped us from sleeping.”

Youth Takeover Day attendee with lived experience of poverty

People are not affected by heat equally, and schools should consider individual student needs and safeguarding implications when taking decisions.

- Young children are inherently less able to regulate their body temperature compared with adults and are more dependent for their support to take adaptive measures such as removing insulation (clothing layers).
- Students often require permission and/or support to take necessary adaptive measures temperatures such as reducing insulation.
- Students of different ages have different thermal comfort preferences (and are generally comfortable and learn better at lower temperatures than adults), but even within age groups there is a high range of variation.
- Many health issues and disabilities can be worsened by high temperatures (including respiratory conditions, epilepsy and anxiety). Certain medications can increase heat risk for those taking them.
- Neurodivergent students will often experience temperature increases (even relatively slight increases) more acutely, and may be more affected by changes in rules and routines resulting from heatwaves.
- Incidences of domestic abuse and childhood neglect increase in hot weather, with neglect increasing at temperatures above 20°C¹.
- Students living in poverty or in poor quality or overcrowded housing are likely to have less respite from heat at home, and to experience worse sleep.
- Students who cannot afford bus or car travel, especially those who live far from school, will have additional heat exposure on journeys to and from home.
- Learning outcomes for children living in poverty are more affected by heat.
- Students living in dense urban areas, with little access to blue green infrastructure, will have additional heat exposure outside of school.

- Hot weather can worsen pre-menstrual symptoms and make periods more uncomfortable.

The greater impacts of heat on students experiencing disadvantage, with disabilities or at risk of neglect mean that school adaptations, including accommodating the differing needs of students, can be particularly beneficial for schools which have high numbers of these students.

Tips for meeting the needs of vulnerable students during warm and hot weather

- ✓ Allowing all students to have autonomy over removing or adding clothing layers will benefit all and allow more vulnerable students to self-regulate without the risk of them being singled out as 'different'.
- ✓ Allow all students free access to water and toilet breaks to reduce dehydration and embarrassment.
- ✓ Include heat risk and adaptations in Education Health and Care Plans and individual risk assessments, recognising increased sensitivities to heat at lower levels and implications of specific conditions or medications.
- ✓ Seat vulnerable children away from heat sources.
- ✓ To reduce disruption, consider changes (e.g. to uniform or timetabling) that are implemented for part or all of the summer term rather than dependent on specific temperatures.
- ✓ Avoid cancelling lunchtime and after school provisions if they can be adapted to reduce activity levels and support cooling of students.
- ✓ Avoid school closure or reduced hours where possible to support safeguarding.
- ✓ Consider how to effectively communicate changes to rules and routines to neurodivergent students and families.
- ✓ Consider hot weather and air quality in all risk assessments.
- ✓ Prioritise cooling sensory and pastoral care areas.
- ✓ Increase the number of trees and green and blue infrastructure within your school grounds if possible (funding is often available).
- ✓ If you have cool buildings or shady grounds, consider making these accessible to the local community outside of school hours.

"I think I get affected by different temperatures a bit easily, like if it's a little bit hot I feel absolutely boiling, if it's a little bit cold it's absolutely freezing. I hate the summer because I get warm too quick..."

Youth Takeover Day attendee with experience of neurodivergence

ⁱ https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w31522/w31522.pdf