

Working safely outdoors

Children go outside unsupervised every day, mostly without incident. Working outside can provide many opportunities to enhance learning, health and well-being. This document provides an overview of general control measures that you **may** need to consider when working with children outside, rather than things you must do. Remember, whatever you want to do, you will need to do an activity-specific risk assessment which may combining general guidance from this document with more specialised advice on for example **ponds, mud kitchens, gardening, bees** (available on the CLEAPSS website).



The environment



Survey the planned work area in advance; take some good quality washing up gloves and heavy duty bin-bags with you. Remove any hazardous objects eg broken glass, animal faeces, dead animals, tin cans etc.

Only adults, wearing good quality washing up gloves, should pick up dead animals and birds, as they may carry disease or parasites. Place any dead animal/bird in a bin liner then double bag the bin liner in a non-see-through bag and put it

in an outside waste bin for direct collection by the refuse service. Throw the gloves away with the animal. To dispose of any animal larger than a cat contact your local authority.

Look up as well as down. If children are to work under trees, check for loose branches. If your class is working outside the school grounds you may need to remove items which need to be disposed of safely, for example syringes/hypodermic needles. If possible, have any trip hazards removed or repaired, for example potholes filled in. Identify any unsafe structures which cannot be repaired with warning signs and tell the children to keep away from them.

Teach children to be respectful of the environment, they should only take away objects that they have been given permission to remove and leave nothing behind.

Supervision

As with any activity the level of supervision needed will be influenced by a range of factors:

- the nature and complexity of the activity;
- the age; maturity; ability and experience of the children; and
- the number of children involved.

Bear-in-mind that children are excited when outside, and are prone to behaving differently.

If your employer has set specific limits, or instructions, about levels of supervision for outdoor activities; you'll need to follow what these are. If their guidance seems unreasonable, talk to them. For more information search **levels of supervision**.

Hygiene

- Children must not taste or put anything they find near their mouths/faces.
- Children must wash their hands with soap and water after working outside or after working with items they've brought in, for example soil or water from a pond.
- Cover any cuts or broken skin with suitable dressings.
- If skin is cut during an activity, follow your school's first aid policy.
- Everyone must wash their hands with soap and water before eating and drinking.

Vaccinations

One standard way of protecting children when they are working outside is by having a tetanus injection. Most children will already be vaccinated against tetanus. If you know that any of your children are not vaccinated talk to their parents/carers about the risks and how to proceed.

Allergies

Common outdoor allergens include plants, animals, pollen and pollution. Common responses include hay fever, asthma attacks and skin irritation/rashes. Teach all adults and children to be alert for the development of allergies, adults must know how to deal with them (follow your school's policy).

Animals

Any animals encountered are unlikely to pose significant risks.

- Bee/wasp stings, although painful, are not a major problem unless a child is allergic. Teach children to stand still if they become the focus of a bee/wasp's attention. For more information search **bees** on the CLEAPSS website.
- Teach children to use appropriate equipment to handle minibeasts, and not to touch them directly.
- Teach children to be wary of hairy caterpillars and to tell an adult if they see any. The Oak Processionary Moth caterpillar is well-known for causing allergic reactions. If you discover hairy caterpillars take a photo and contact your Local Authority Environmental Service Department for advice.
- Teach children to report any injured birds and animals they find to a member of staff, and to not touch them.
- If you and your children encounter a dead or dying animal you will need to move to another location,
- Depending on the circumstance you may have to abandon/reschedule the activity. Contact the RSPCA as soon as possible.



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If you are taking children off-site, during your pre-activity assess what animals/wildlife you may encounter and brief the children accordingly. While off site:

- All children must be in sight and earshot of supporting adults at all times.
- Teach children not to approach animals/wildlife that they are not learning about.
- If a dog approaches a child voluntarily, teach them to stand still and put their hands close to their body and arms down. Tell them not to scream as this will upset the dog.
- If wildfowl approach, teach children to gather together and to call for help.

If you are planning to eat lunch out, make sure you know where there are handwashing facilities. If none are available, take hand wipes and alcohol hand gel sanitiser with you. Teach children not to feed animals. However, tempted by the presence of food, animals may approach your children. Place yourself and your colleagues strategically based on what may be in the area.

Plants and fungi

There are hundreds of poisonous plants, seeds, mushrooms and toadstools found in school grounds, parks and on allotments. Yet serious poisoning by plants is uncommon in the UK. The risk of poisoning from plants is low because most labelled 'poisonous' are only hazardous when eaten and only toxic if eaten in large quantities.

- Teach children to not eat plants or touch fungi they find.
- Warn children that attractive looking fruits and seeds on plants may look edible but are not.

If you suspect a child has eaten something dubious:

1. Do not try to make the child be sick
2. Ring 111 and explain what has happened
3. If possible, have a sample of the plant/fungi to hand

Weather and clothing

Check the weather forecast, and make sure children have appropriate clothing and footwear for the weather and activity.

In hot weather, limit the amount of time that children are in the sun and encourage them to wear broad spectrum sun cream and hats. It may be necessary for children to cover up arms and legs in loose fitting clothing and take shade regularly. Watch out for individuals being overcome by heat exhaustion, and have plenty of drinking water available.

In cold weather, children should have layered clothing for insulation, a windproof jacket and covered legs. Gloves and hats may be required in very cold weather. In extreme cold/snow, children must be well insulated. Wellington boots do not provide enough insulation; sturdy shoes/boots are better. Watch out for individuals getting too cold.

In wet weather, children should wear wellington boots and a waterproof coat with a hood.



Lifting and carrying

Teach children and adults how to lift loads properly ie keeping the back straight and knees bent. The risks for any load need to be assessed on an individual basis taking in to account age, strength, experience, maturity and fitness as well as the working environment eg slippery mud.

- Avoid bending or twisting the back when carrying a heavy load.
- Use correctly sized/size appropriate equipment to help carry heavy loads eg wheelbarrows or trollies when necessary.
- If manual handling of cumbersome or heavy objects cannot be avoided, several adults may be needed to lift or carry an item, such work is generally unsuitable for children.

Tools

- All adults must know how to use tools correctly. Follow CLEAPSS tool guidance search **tools** on the CLEAPSS website.
- Teach children how to use tools correctly before using them, for example, how to saw safely.

Sand pits and water trays

Site sand pits and water trays away from any electrical equipment, and ensure they are covered when not in use. Before uncovering the pit or tray wipe off any condensation that has formed. Then check the sand/water for faeces and rubbish, refresh with clean sand/water as required.

With use, the sand and water will become dirty, and when this happens replace them. Use silver sand or children's play sand, rather than builders' sand because they raise less dust, are not as abrasive and are unlikely to stain. Regularly wash out the water tray and clean any toys in either.

- Teach children to not rub their eyes if they get sand in them. To remove any grains, wash their eyes gently with clean **running** water and follow your first aid policy.
- Teach children to wash and dry their hands after they've used either water or sand trays.

Splash puddles

A splash puddle should be wide and shallow (around 5 cm deep). They can be made on mud or by filling a dip in the playground. Refresh the water on days that they are being used, by overfilling the hole until the water runs clear.