

Winter planning for schools and early years settings: 2025-26

City and Hackney Public Health

October 2025

Contents

Background: cold weather risks to health

Proactive measures and response:

- Preventing and controlling infection
- Planning ahead of outbreaks
- Reporting cases and outbreaks
- Mild illness guide
- Actions to take before cold weather
- Actions to take during cold weather

Additional resources


Cold weather is a risk to health - both directly and indirectly

UK Health Security Agency

COLD WEATHER

The direct and indirect effects of cold weather

Exposure to cold weather can affect your health in different ways, even at temperatures as mild as 4 to 8 °C



Direct effects

- heart attack
- stroke
- increased risk of respiratory disease
- weakened lung function causing an increased risk of influenza
- falls and injuries
- hypothermia

Indirect effects

- disruption to healthcare services caused by snow and ice
- carbon monoxide poisoning
- poorer mental health and reduced educational and employment attainment have been linked to cold homes and fuel poverty

Reduce risk through infection prevention and control, vaccination and cold weather preparedness.

Proactive steps that settings can take to reduce risk include:

- **Vaccination:** encouraging uptake of seasonal, childhood and maternal vaccinations.
- **Preventing and controlling infection:** by promoting good hygiene practices to limit infectious disease transmission.
- **Effective response to infections:** to minimise impacts from cases or outbreaks.
- **Ensuring cold weather preparation and response plans are in place.**
- **Guidelines:** communicating clear protocols for managing mild illness.

Hygiene is essential for preventing and controlling the spread of infections

Measure	What you need to do
Hand Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure liquid soap, warm water and paper towels are readily available and easily accessible to all• Advise everyone to clean their hands before eating or handling food, after using the toilet, after playtime and after touching animals• Educate children and young people on the importance of hand hygiene
Respiratory Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advise everyone to follow the 'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it' protocol• Educate children and young people on the importance of hand hygiene
Cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep settings clean, including areas with particular attention to hand touch surfaces that can be easily contaminated (e.g. door handles, toilet flushes etc) and where food is handled.
Wider Hygiene	More guidance of hygiene practice, including cleaning, PPE and safe management of the school environment can be found here .

It is important to plan ahead for outbreaks

Outbreaks increase the risk for staff absence and operational disruption.

Vaccination can reduce infection transmission and outbreak risk. Proactive measures include:

- Ensuring staff are up to date with their routine and seasonal immunisations.
- Reminding parents and carers to keep their children up to date with routine immunisations.
- Collaborating with the school-age-immunisation service (Vaccination UK) to plan visits, support consenting, and promote attendance to hosted community catch-up clinics.

Additional measures to prevent outbreaks include:

- Encouraging all who are unwell to stay at home or remain separate from others.
- Ensuring indoor spaces are well ventilated and let fresh air in.
- Reinforcing good hygiene practices (outlined in this presentation).
- Requesting that parents, carers or students report a diagnosis of any infectious disease.
- Developing business continuity plans (inc. identifying and making plans for those vulnerable) ahead of time.

Any outbreaks of an infectious disease must be reported to the UKHSA Health Protection Team

Most coughs and colds can be managed under business as usual.

Instances where support may be needed from the UKHSA North London Health Protection Team include:

- a **high** or rapidly increasing **number** of pupil or staff **absences** due to acute respiratory infection
- **severe disease** due to respiratory infection e.g. if a pupil or staff member is admitted to hospital
- a **cluster of cases** affecting vulnerable staff or students
- **transmission** in **boarding** or **residential** school environments

Please report any of the above instances to the UKHSA North London Health Protection Team

Telephone: 0300 30 30 450

Email: london.region@ukhsa.gov.uk or phe.london.region@nhs.net for PII (patient identifiable information) - remember not to include PII in the subject line of an email.

The mild illness guide helps settings and parents know when it is appropriate for children to attend

Guidance is available to help [parents](#) and [settings](#) understand whether children should attend school or not if they are unwell.

The guidance for settings recommends that:

- Children **go to school** with mild respiratory illnesses (minor cough or runny nose, sore throat).
- Children with a temperature over 38°C and more severe respiratory illnesses should be **kept at home**.

Send to school	Keep at home
Minor cough or common cold	Fever/high temperature
Cold sores	Chickenpox
Conjunctivitis	COVID-19
Hand foot and mouth disease (if they feel well)	Ear infection
Head lice and nits	Impetigo
Slapped cheek syndrome (fifth disease)	Scarlet fever
Sore throat	Vomiting and diarrhoea
Threadworms	Measles
Ringworm	

The following actions should be taken by settings before cold weather

Premises

- Ensure heating systems are maintained.
- Draught-proof windows and doors.
- Identify high-risk areas (in the event of ice/snow) like entrances and playground areas, prioritising these for clearance/gritting.

Supporting children

- Promote routine vaccination uptake and hand and respiratory hygiene.
- Provide advice on appropriate clothing for adverse cold weather, ice or snow.
- Provide parents with [information on children attending school/early years settings when ill](#).

Staff

- Ensure relevant staff members are aware of and understand emergency and/or cold weather plans.
- Support training to help staff identify children most likely to be at risk from adverse cold weather (e.g. [‘Helping people living in cold homes’ e-learning module](#)) and then signpost parents/carers to sources of support.
- Test out and ensure local dissemination systems for [Cold-Health Alerts](#) are fully operational and effective, and that staff understand actions to take on receipt.

The following actions should be taken during cold weather

Premises

Adverse cold weather, snow and ice may create hazardous conditions. Settings can reduce this risk by:

- gritting and removing ice and/or snow from priority areas and routes;
- prioritising maintenance of heating systems to keep rooms being used warm; and
- closing rooms or buildings that are too cold for children, young people and staff members to use.

Supporting children

- Provide advice on appropriate activities and clothing to wear during adverse cold weather.
- Provide information to children, young people and their parents or carers on important logistical changes during severe weather episodes.
- Complete risk assessments and providing advice on reducing the risk of injury in icy and/or snowy conditions, and outdoor play in these conditions where risk assessments indicate this is possible.

Resources

- [Health protection in children and young people settings, including education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [What infections are, how they are transmitted, and those at higher risk of infection](#)
- [Should I keep my child off school checklist poster \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)
- [A guide to immunisation for young people](#)
- [Looking after children and those in early years settings before and during cold weather: teachers and other educational professionals](#)
- [UKHSA blog: A parent's guide to keeping kids healthy this school year](#)
- [e-Bug](#) - a range of resources which can help educate young people on infection prevention and control and how to prevent antimicrobial resistance