



**Schools HR
Consultancy**
Management
Guidance

MANAGING STAFF DURING A HEATWAVE Q&A FOR SCHOOLS



Tibberton and Hindlip CE First Schools



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1. Are there legal temperature limits for workplaces?

No. UK law does not set a maximum working temperature.

However, schools **must ensure the workplace is “reasonably comfortable”** and safe. This means:

- Monitoring indoor temperatures
- Taking steps to reduce heat where possible
- Carrying out a risk assessment if conditions become difficult

2. What practical steps should schools take in a heatwave?

Schools should take reasonable measures such as:

- Providing water and encouraging staff to stay hydrated
- Allowing more frequent breaks
- Adjusting dress expectations where possible
- Using blinds, fans, or moving activities to cooler areas
- Adjusting the school day where appropriate (e.g. avoiding strenuous activities at peak heat)

3. Can staff be sent home if it is too hot?

Yes, but this should be a last resort.

If a school closes fully or partially:

- Staff who are ready and willing to work should normally still be paid
- Consider whether staff can carry out alternative duties or work from home (if appropriate)

4. What if a school closes and a staff member needs to care for their child?

If a child’s school or childcare setting closes due to heat:

Staff have a **legal right to reasonable unpaid time off for dependants** to deal with the emergency care situation.

Key points:

- This is usually short-term (e.g. 1–2 days while arrangements are made)
- It is typically unpaid, unless your policy says otherwise



- Some schools may choose to allow:
 - o Paid leave at discretion
 - o Annual leave
 - o Flexibility or home working

Consistency is important across staff.

5. Can schools insist staff take annual leave in these situations?

Only with **appropriate notice** (normally double the length of the leave you are requiring).

In emergency closures, it is better to:

- Seek agreement with staff
- Offer options rather than impose leave at short notice

Some staff may have booked annual leave when the school closes at short notice due to a heat wave. If other staff are given paid leave then it may be reasonable to allow staff that have booked leave to have the leave back equivalent to what other staff have been given i.e. if they booked leave for 1 day and the school closes at lunchtime then it may be reasonable to allow them to have half a day of leave back.

6. How should pregnant staff be managed in a heatwave?

Pregnant staff are a **protected group under health and safety law**.

Schools must:

- Carry out an individual risk assessment
- Consider risks such as dehydration, fatigue, and overheating

If risks are identified, you must take steps in this order:

1. Adjust working conditions or hours (e.g. shorter day, cooler workspace)
2. Offer suitable alternative work
3. If neither is possible, **suspend on full pay**

7. What about staff with medical conditions or vulnerabilities?

This may include staff with:

- Heart conditions



- Respiratory issues
- Disabilities affected by heat

Schools should:

- Consider reasonable adjustments (under Equality Act 2010 where applicable)
- Review risk assessments
- Discuss individual needs with the employee

Adjustments might include:

- Flexible hours
- Remote working (where feasible)
- Reduced duties
- Access to cooler environments

8. Can staff refuse to work if they feel it is unsafe?

Employees have protection if they reasonably believe there is a **serious and imminent danger**.

In practice:

- Concerns should be raised and addressed promptly
- Schools should assess risks and act reasonably
- Open communication is key

9. Should outdoor activities be changed?

Yes. During extreme heat:

- Avoid sports and strenuous activity at peak temperatures
- Move activities indoors or to shaded areas
- Follow public health guidance where available

10. What about dress codes?

Schools should take a **flexible and reasonable approach**, for example:

- Allowing lighter clothing



- Relaxing requirements such as ties or jackets

Professional standards should still be maintained where possible.

11. Can staff work from home during a heatwave?

In most school roles, this will be limited. However, consider it where:

- The role allows it (e.g. administrative tasks)
- The school is partially closed
- It supports vulnerable staff

12. Key principles for schools

- Prioritise **health and safety**
- Apply **fair and consistent decision-making**
- Be **flexible where possible**
- Keep a **clear record of decisions and risk assessments**

13. Further Advice

For further advice, please contact the Schools HR Consultancy Team on 01905 844560 or via SchoolsHRconsultancy@worcestershire.gov.uk

14. Policy History

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