

# **ADVERSE WEATHER** **SNOW AND ICE**

## **Health, Safety & Wellbeing Guidance** **Children's Services Department**

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## **ADVERSE WEATHER**

### **CLOSURE OF ESTABLISHMENTS DUE TO SNOW**

Every year many establishments are faced with the difficult decision of whether to close during periods of snowfall. The decisions are often accompanied by adverse publicity or complaint. Equally other establishments due to the nature of their operation must remain open. The following guidance aims to address both situations.

Whilst it goes without saying that every effort should be made to keep establishments open during periods of snowfall the following advice indicates the health and safety issues you will need to consider if there is significant snowfall.

1. Will sufficient staff be able to reach the establishment to ensure pupils/service users can be adequately and safely supervised? This will depend on such factors as location of the school / establishment and where staff live in relation to it. Availability of public transport, state of roads to / from sites.
2. Can safely access routes to and from the establishment's gate(s) to entrances be maintained e.g. do you have sufficient staff to clear routes and grit them as necessary.

If the answer to either of the above is no, then the establishment should not be opened as the safety of pupils / service users and staff cannot be guaranteed

Whilst Safety on the public highways is not the responsibility of the school / establishment this may well play a part in the decision on whether to open. It is certainly likely to play a part in any decision on whether to close early if snow should start to fall heavily, especially when coupled with up-to-date weather reports. As travel on the public highway is discouraged unless essential during periods of heavy snowfall schools / establishments whose pupils / service users predominantly must travel a significant distance to attend the establishment may choose not to open or to close early during such weather. This is unlikely to be as much of an issue for schools / establishments whose pupils / service users and staff predominantly live within walking distance.

Other options which schools / establishments may wish to consider may include delaying opening until a later time than normal when routes may have been cleared / gritted.

## **General Winter Precautions for Establishments When Not Closing or Who Cannot Close.**

There is a statutory duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure safe access and egress routes to, from and around the premises for staff, pupils / service users and visitors. The following precautions (or a combination of some of them as appropriate to your circumstances) will help you to meet this duty.

1. Ensure you have a suitable supply of grit / salt on the premises to deal with the areas you need to grit during icy / snowy weather. Where possible store the grit / salt as close as you can to the area where it is to be used.
2. Ensure you have a plan and suitable risk assessment detailing which areas are to be cleared/gritted based on the risk of people slipping / falling. This will need to pay particular attention to areas at most risk. At least one designated access / egress route should be gritted (and re-gritted throughout the day as necessary). The timing of the gritting should be considered as gritting will need to take place before people arrive and in time for it to work but not re freeze. Where temperatures remain at or below freezing throughout the day, those routes which have been gritted will need to be checked periodically and especially before times of regular usage and re-gritted as necessary.
3. Ensure that all users of the establishment (including members of the public and visitors) are made aware of which the designated gritted / cleared routes are. For regular visitors e.g. parents, service users etc. this could be by letter and newsletters. You should however also take measures to prevent anyone using non-gritted routes this could be by using signs or barriers and/or by locking gates to those routes.
4. Ensure you have people designated to carry out the gritting/clearing and that they have appropriate equipment; personal protective equipment, boots, gloves, coats etc, training and sufficient time to carry this out. They should be fully familiar with all the risk assessments relevant to this work and be given suitable instruction on how to carry out the work, including use of equipment.
5. A manual handling assessment will need to be carried out for the gritting operation.
6. Car parking areas should be gritted. The level of gritting will depend on the size, shape and layout including steepness of the car park. For example, a sloping car park may need to be fully gritted, a flat car park may only require the access routes (not individual bays) gritted. This will be a decision for individual establishments to make.

7. If for logistical reasons it is decided car parks cannot be gritted then they should be closed until such time as they can be gritted or can be made safe, and access to the car park should be prevented by barriers, signs or if possible, locking the gates to the car park.
8. Access to other areas which have not been gritted / cleared should be restricted (it is not sensible to grit playgrounds and so in icy conditions access to playgrounds should be restricted).
9. It may be appropriate to let pupils out to play in playgrounds covered in fresh snow if it is not icy underneath and pupils have on appropriate footwear and over clothing and are suitably supervised.
10. Staff should be advised to wear appropriate footwear during icy / snowy conditions.

Staff routinely required to work outside during periods of adverse weather should be provided with appropriate personal protective equipment to keep them dry and warm. They should also be provided with suitable footwear to minimise the risk of slipping in snowy / icy conditions, this could also be achieved by the provision of non-slip / ice cleats that staff can fit over their own footwear when appropriate.

### Risk Assessment

Schools / establishments are also reminded that there is a generic risk assessment for adverse weather which they should be aware of and have adopted / adapted to their establishment.

### Further Support

If schools / establishments are in any doubt about any issue relating to adverse weather, they should in the first instance contact their Corporate Services & Transformation, Advisory & Specialist Services (previously Children Services) Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team.