

Insight - a closer look at

Slips, trips and falls in schools



Education

Slips, trips and falls in schools contents

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Slips, trips and falls in schools

The Health and Safety Executive website suggests that over half the accidents occurring in the education sector involve slips and trips. Over a quarter of these involved members of staff and most of the accidents to staff resulted in significant injuries that caused a significant absence from work.

Other people at risk include pupils and members of the public who may be on site to use the school facilities as part of the schools' role in the community. The frequency of these slip and trip accidents appears to be on the increase so schools need to focus on preventing accidents involving staff as well as pupils.





Common causes of slips and trips in schools include:



People running



People carrying items that restrict their vision



Unsuitable footwear



Poor lighting



Trailing cables and baggage causing an obstruction



Spillages and contamination of floors with food and litter.

Most trips and slips occur in school corridors and outside areas and other key slips and trips locations are stairs, classrooms, canteens and kitchen areas. Practical steps can be taken to prevent slips and trips can be taken and it has been found that these steps really do work in practice.

Practical steps include:

- Fitting anti slip and high visibility treads to stairs
- Issuing take away drinks cups with a lid to prevent spillages
- Providing a large entrance mat to allow rainwater to be soaked off pedestrians shoes
- Fitting carpet to corridors and anti slip flooring in workshops
- Proactive measures for applying grit to outside walkways before the bulk of the staff arrive on site
- Install a canopy over doorways to prevent rainwater being walked into buildings
- Fit non slip epoxy sheets to slippery outside walkways
- Ensure that spillages are dealt with quickly
- Use a degreasing agent when cleaning hard floors
- Provide slip and trip prevention training to staff.



Specific roles

The prevention of slips and trips in schools needs a team approach from a range of different people involved in a school. Examples of recommended steps for different roles within the school include:

Head Teachers and Facilities Managers

- Consider slip and trip prevention in the design process e.g. include canopies over entrances and provision of adequate lighting.
- Ensure the right floor covering for the use of the space is selected and matched with the correct floor-cleaning regime.
- Check cleaning and maintenance procedures are upheld.
- Introduce rules to ensure that pedestrians wear the correct type of footwear.

Health and Safety Managers and Bursaries

- Carry out a specific slip and trip risk assessment.
- Carry out an inspection process to check on floor condition and make a note of the inspections.

Teaching and Office Staff

- Ensure that spillages are cleaned up quickly.
- Report problems with flooring, spillages, trip hazards etc. and warn others of the hazard with a warning sign and prevent pedestrian access to wet and contaminated floor areas.
- Ensure staff wear suitable shoes.
- Prevent trailing leads.

Catering and Kitchen Staff

- Those staff working in and around the kitchens should also be cleaning up spills quickly and reporting problems with flooring surfaces.
- A deep clean of the floor should be completed at the end of each day.

Cleaners and Caretakers

- Specific instructions on how to clean different floor surfaces should be provided to cleaning staff.
- The instructions should ensure that the right quantities of the right cleaning product are used to undertake a deep clean at the end of the school day.

A checklist to be used to monitor slips and trips around the school on a regular basis could include some of the following points:

Issue	Problem identified		Problem	Remedial Action
	Yes	No		
Is lighting adequate in outside areas?				
Do steps and slopes have handrails?				
Are Paths and steps in good condition?				
Are changes in floor level marked with high visibility tread nosings or markings?				
Are floor coverings in good repair and condition?				
Are pedestrian routes unobstructed?				
Are there trailing cables?				
Are floors being left wet after cleaning?				
Are doormats of adequate size provided in entrance areas?				
Are there spillages and contamination left on the floor?				





Sports facilities

Many schools have sports facilities like halls and pools that are used by members of the public as well as by pupils. Slips and trips in the leisure and sports facilities operated by schools can occur easily and opening the facilities to the public only increases the exposure to claims. So what steps can schools take? Here are some actions to consider:

- A fall of floor surface in wet floor areas around the pool of between 1 in 35 and 1 in 60 coupled with a 25 stud ceramic tile surface should give a surface that prevents slips.
- If the floor surface round the pool cannot be changed quickly and slip accidents are occurring, provide ribbed plastic matting.
- Ensure gullies and drainage channels do not provide a trip hazard, both around the pool and outside.
- Colour contrast the pool surround.
- Make a regular check of playing surfaces to ensure that the floor is in good condition.
- Look out for problems with fencing and structures around playing areas that could catch facility users and cause an injury.
- Make sure that thought has been given to how the emergency services are summoned and get to the school if the public is using it on an evening.
- Keep a record of inspections that are carried out to ensure that sports facilities are maintained in good condition.



Learning from legal cases

In *Tedstone v Bourne Leisure Ltd* (2008) the claimant, Mrs Tedstone alleged that she slipped on a pool of water whilst she was poolside at a leisure centre. The pool was unsupervised and there was no lifeguard. It was suggested by the claimant that the accident was not investigated properly. This resulted in an argument over the source of the water that the claimant slipped on and whether there even was any water to slip on.

An independent witness told the court that the water could not have come from another pool user. The same witness confirmed that there was no water on the floor five minutes before the accident. This suggested that the water had not been on the floor for long. The court found that there was little the defendant could do to clear the spillage before the accident occurred.

The defendant was lucky that a third party user of the facilities came forward as a witness. The following steps would have helped in this case:

- Taking the time to carry out inspections of the facility and make records of the inspections.
- Take witness statements immediately in the event of an accident.
- Gather the inspection records for the day of the accident to be able to show that the inspection system was operating at the time of the accident.



Summary

Slips and trips incidents are one of the key causes of claims in the education sector. The use of risk assessments to identify hazards, training of staff to tackle hazards when they see them and the implementation of a robust regime of workplace inspection will stand a school in good stead for preventing and mitigating slip and trip claims.

Further guidance

Further guidance on swimming pool safety can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg179.pdf>

A hazard spotting checklist can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck4.pdf>

Guidance on assessing the slip resistance of flooring can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/geis2.htm>



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