

Winter planning for schools and early years settings: 2024-25

City & Hackney Public Health

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CONTENTS

Background: cold weather risks to health

Proactive measures and response:

- Preventing and controlling infection
- Preventing and responding to outbreaks
- Mild illness guidelines
- Preparing for and responding to adverse weather conditions

Infectious disease updates: measles and pertussis (whooping cough)

Additional resources



Rates of infection increase in winter, having a plan in place reduces this risk.

COLD WEATHER RISKS TO HEALTH OVERVIEW

The winter season increases health risks, requiring schools and early years settings to take proactive measures:

- **Infection Risk:** As schools reopen, the likelihood of outbreaks rises with respiratory infections like flu and gastrointestinal issues like norovirus becoming more common. Declining vaccination rates also increase vulnerability to vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and whooping cough.
- **Cold Weather Health Impacts:** Cold weather can also worsen skin conditions like eczema, and negatively affect mental health, especially in children and those with pre-existing health conditions.

Proactive steps that settings can take to reduce risk include:

- **Vaccination:** encouraging uptake of seasonal, school-age and maternal vaccinations.
- **Infection prevention and control:** promoting good hygiene practices to limit transmission.
- **Effective response to infections:** minimising the impact from cases and outbreaks.
- **Cold weather preparation:** ensuring preparedness and response plans for adverse weather.
- **Guidelines:** communicating clear protocols for managing mild illness.



Preventing and controlling infection



Practicing and encouraging hand, respiratory and wider hygiene in schools/early years settings can prevent and control infection

PREVENTING AND CONTROLLING INFECTION

Hygiene	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



Preventing and responding to outbreaks



Schools suffer during outbreaks; develop a plan to reduce the impact of any future outbreaks

PLANNING 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.



Contact the UKHSA Health Protection Team if you have increasing numbers of respiratory illnesses in staff and/or pupils

RESPONDING TO RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS AND OUTBREAKS

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

Instances where support may be needed from the 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**

North London Health Protection Team

Telephone: 0300 30 30 450

Email:

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



Mild illness guidelines



The CMO has developed guidance to help parents decide whether to send their children to school or not if they are mildly unwell

MILD ILLNESS GUIDE

As children and young people return to school, the Chief Medical Officer has provided guidance to help parents understand whether they should send their children to school or not if they are unwell.

The guidance recommends that:

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

Further information can be found in the:

- [Letter to school leaders on mild illness and school attendance](#)
- [NHS 'Is my child too ill for school?' guidance](#)

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	
Ringworm	

Preparing for and responding to adverse weather



Support children and families at greater risk and ensure cold weather plans and alert cascades are in place.

ACTIONS TO TAKE 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.



Maintain heating, and clear high-risk areas through gritting. Provide information to children and their families.

ACTIONS TO TAKE 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.



Infectious disease updates: measles and pertussis (whooping cough)



Vaccination remains the cornerstone to preventing measles spreading; 2 MMR doses are needed for full protection.

MEASLES UPDATE

Measles situation update

- Ongoing cases peaking in May 2024 with a downward trend observed since.
- Majority of activity has been driven in London, which remains at level 3 transmission.
- Comparatively low activity in City and Hackney with 12 confirmed cases since January 2024.
- Median age ~7 years, with 75% of cases <17. Higher rates among females, Black/Black British populations and most deprived areas.
- Potential for increased transmission as schools resume.

Key messages to education/early years settings:

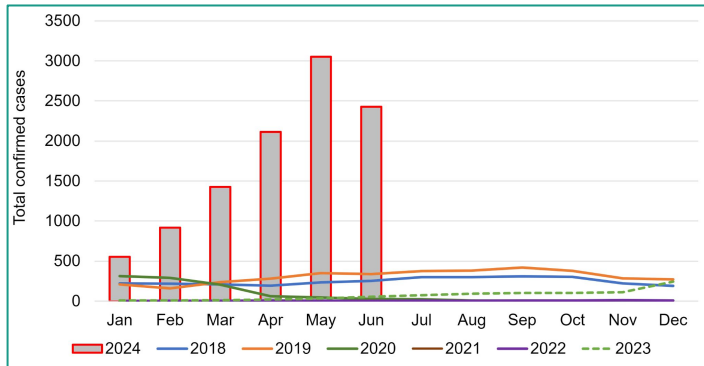
- 2 doses of measles, mump and rubella (MMR) vaccine are needed for lifelong protection. It's never too late to catch-up, whatever the age.
- Contact the North London Health Protection Team on 0300 3030 450 if you are made aware of, or suspect a case of measles.
 - Report any potentially vulnerable contacts (immunosuppressed, unvaccinated pregnant women, and children under 1).
- Confirmed or suspected cases should stay home until 4 days after the rash starts (day 0) and fully recover before returning as they are more likely to get other illnesses.

Whooping cough is circulating at high levels in Hackney. Any cases should be reported to the UKHSA Health Protection Team.

PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH) UPDATE

Whooping cough situation update

- Ongoing surge with 10,492 confirmed cases between Jan-June 2024 nationally (Fig. 1). High rates of activity in Hackney with at least 150 confirmed cases since Jan 2024.



Key messages to education/early years settings:

- Whooping cough can start like a cold with a runny nose and mild fever, which then develops into severe coughing fits after 1-2 weeks, sometimes causing vomiting.
- Vaccination is the best defence against whooping cough. The whooping cough vaccine is given as part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule in the UK, at 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age, with a pre-school booster offered from 3 years and 4 months.
- Contact the North London Health Protection Team on 0300 3030 450 if you are made aware of, or suspect a case of whooping cough.

Additional resources



Below is a list of useful resources to help understand guidance around outbreak prevention and vaccinations this winter

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Health protection in children and young people settings, including education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
- [Should I keep my child off school checklist poster \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)
- [A guide to immunisation for young people - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
- [Looking after children and those in early years settings before and during cold weather: teachers and other educational professionals](#)
- [Measles: information for schools and healthcare centres](#)
- [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