**Air Quality Impact and Response Guide for Schools**

This guide should be used as a basis for responding to air quality impacts at your school and should be used in addition to and read alongside:

* [*Managing Extreme Temperatures Procedure*](https://www.education.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/corporate-policies/school-administration-and-management/issues-management/procedures-for-managing-extreme-temperatures-in-act-public-schools-internal-access-only)
* [*Excursion Policy*](https://www.education.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/School-and-Corporate-Policies/school-activities/excursions/excursions-policy)
* [*First Aid Policy*](https://www.education.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/School-and-Corporate-Policies/wellbeing/health/first-aid/First-Aid-Policy)
* [*Emergency Planning and Fire Safety Policy and Procedure*](https://index.ed.act.edu.au/governance/policies/files-policies/word/emergency-planning-fire-safety-policy.docx)
* [*Emergency Planning and Fire Safety Procedure*](https://index.ed.act.edu.au/governance/files-go/pdf/emergency-planning-and-fire-safety-procedure-av.pdf)
* [*Visitor’s Policy*](https://www.education.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/corporate-policies/wellbeing/child-protection/working-with-children-and-young-people-volunteers-and-visitors-interim-policy)

Please ensure the week 0 checklist is completed (Attachment A). This will ensure you have all necessary information and readiness to allow you to enact the following steps in this guide.

**For the purposes of this guide the following categories apply:**

1. **Sensitive Staff**

* Pregnant women
* People over 65 years
* Those with existing heart or lung conditions (including asthma)

1. **Sensitive students**

* Children 14 years or younger – (For practical purposes – Year 9 and below).
* Those with existing heart or lung conditions (including asthma)
* Pregnant students

1. **All other staff**
2. **All other students**

**Assessing Air Quality**

Air quality ratings provide an indicative view of the potential air quality issues within a broad geographic area. While this information is useful, it is not sufficient to guide local responses. For this reason, air quality monitoring is most reliably undertaken through direct observations, including by:

* **Looking** – for visible signs of smoke or haze, check windows and doors are used appropriately, and ensure activities are not affecting the indoor air quality.
* **Smelling** – check for odours indicating that smoke may be present. Note specific areas/rooms that are affected.
* **Feeling** – Check air is flowing from vents.
* **Listening** – to the concerns of the students and staff. Do they experience any air quality related symptoms? Listen for unusual equipment noises that may indicate potential problems.

**How to use this guide**

Air quality should be assessed on a daily basis, and regularly reviewed throughout the day if conditions change. The level of impact should be determined, noting that different areas within the school may be impacted to a different degree. Once the level of impact is determined, appropriate responses can be put in place. These are set out in the Impact Levels at Figure 1 and in Table 1: Impact Responses. Support on additional controls and how to best implement them is available from ESO from: [EDURMA@act.gov.au](mailto:EDURMA@act.gov.au).

All staff should be advised of the controls and their role in implementing them effectively across the school day. Training and support should be made available to staff who require additional assistance if required. Students should be advised of the controls that will be implemented at the start of the school day in developmentally appropriate ways.

This guide is a general and universal approach to controls for all schools. Its implementation should be localized to the site and the individual needs of the students, staff and school. Further information can also be accessed [here.](https://index.ed.act.edu.au/governance/air-quality-in-schools.html)

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**Figure 1: Impact Levels**

\*due to limited controls available for sensitive groups in offsite locations.

\*\*see definition of local

\*\*\*for specific responses see table 1.

The Education Directorate risk assessments for staff and students are at attachments B1 and B2. The school level incident action plan based on this framework is at attachment C. Please complete to your local context and return to [schooloperations@act.gov.au](mailto:schooloperations@act.gov.au).

**Others on Site - Visitors, volunteers, workers, OHSC and other site users Advice**

All **visitors and volunteers** to the site should be made aware of the current air quality conditions and the controls in place for both sensitive and general groups. They should also be asked if they require any additional supports based on their own circumstances. This should happen at the beginning of each day they are present.

Site induction processes for all **workers** on Site should incorporate the current air quality conditions and the controls in place for both sensitive and general groups. They should also be asked if they require any additional supports based on their own circumstances. This information will need to be updated to workers each day.

**Out of School Hours Care** (OSHC) providers and community users of school facilities should be advised of the air quality impacts for the day and the controls and adjustments at the school that have been enacted that day.

**Staff at school**

The Education Directorate have developed support documentation for staff including Frequently Asked Questions to support the operations of schools and ensuring all staff are aware of entitlements, leave and safety. These can be found [here.](https://index.ed.act.edu.au/governance/air-quality-in-schools.html) If you have any concerns or require additional support with staff related matters, please contact the Education Directorate WHS Hotline on 6207 0614.

**Indoor Air Quality**

Monitoring of symptoms of all people at the school is a major control embedded in the guide. If you have concerns about air quality conditions within the school buildings and they are significantly impacting wellbeing to staff and students please contact School Operations on (02) 6205 3133. Additional controls and supports will be assessed and provided based on individual school circumstances.

**Venting Buildings**

The opportunity to vent and refresh air in buildings should be undertaken in line with the strategies outlined in managing extreme temperature procedures and when external air quality is normal.

**Evaporative Cooling**

Evaporative cooling should not be used when external air quality is poor. This will obviously impact effectiveness of controls as heat and the use of indoor spaces intersect. This will need to be closely monitored at those times. If your school has a site specific vulnerability or high likelihood of this being significant impact please contact [schooloperations@act.gov.au](mailto:schooloperations@act.gov.au).

**Prolonged duration of controls being implemented**

The cumulative impact of controls across multiple days should be closely monitored for its impact on student and staff wellbeing. A range of additional controls should be considered when addressing prolonged events. These include:

* Rotating and providing respite to staff to provide down time and breaks. This might include bringing additional staff into the school for this purpose.
* Enabling staff to conduct work from alternative locations including from the ESO.
* Rotating student groups into varying areas of the school over different days and providing a range of alternative activities.
* Prioritising and adjusting workload and deliverables.
* In situations where lower level controls are no longer effective, significant adjustments to timetabling and attendance at schools may be considered, including year level or cohorts remaining at home. This must only be done in consultation with ESO by contacting [schooloperations@act.gov.au](mailto:schooloperations@act.gov.au).

**Authority to close a School Site**

The hierarchy of controls includes the contemplation of site closure and the off-site rotation of students. This must be done in consultation with ESO. If controls are no longer effective, please contact ESO on (02) 6205 3133. Authority to close a school site resides with the Director General, Emergency Management Directorate Liaison Officers, or Directors of School Improvement and must only be undertaken in accordance with the *Temporary Closure of Schools Policy.*

**Wellbeing Supports**

Students:

* Please monitor the demand and needs of student wellbeing supports and procedures within your school and make necessary adjustments as required.
* School psychologists have undertaken additional professional learning in responding to impacts of natural disasters and will be offering supports in this area.
* Parents may elect to keep their child at home in response to issues of air quality at any time. Please support parent’s choices and requests in line with the attendance policy.

Staff:

* Staff EAP supports are available to staff impacted by recent bushfires or current air quality events. Further information relating to staff wellbeing and supports is available [here.](https://index.ed.act.edu.au/governance/air-quality-in-schools.html)

**Interstate Excursions and Camps**

ESO will be supporting schools by actively managing risk assessments and threat analysis in areas where schools are planning to conduct excursions and camps. Many areas traditionally used by ACT schools in NSW have been impacted by bushfires and this may impact the ability to use these sites going forward. The ongoing impact of heat, fire and fire danger ratings in these locations will be continuously assessed by ESA and schools advised if alternative options or rescheduling needs to occur. Schools have been asked to provide all details of these activities in the week 0 checklist. Any further information or advice can be accessed through the ESA website.

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| **Table 1: Impact Responses- noting additional responses may be required to respond to local needs** | | | | | |
| **Impact** | **Response** | **Sensitive Students** | **All Students** | **Sensitive Staff** | **All Staff** |
| **Normal Conditions** | **Business as Usual** | * Monitoring symptoms and reduce activity as needed * Continue to review advice from ESO including forecast for days ahead to consider for planning | * Monitoring environmental conditions and individual responses * Continue to review advice from ESO including forecast for days ahead to consider for planning | * Monitoring symptoms and reduce activity as needed * Continue to review advice from ESO including forecast for days ahead to consider for planning | * Monitoring environmental conditions and individual responses * Continue to review advice from ESO |
| **Minimal** | **Implement mitigations for sensitive groups** | **Reduce prolonged or heavy physical activity and limit time spent outdoors**   * Reasonable adjustments to outdoor or physical activities including structured and unstructured play * Make internal spaces available * Monitor symptoms and manage as needed * **Postpone whole school prolonged outdoor physical activity including swimming and sports carnivals\*** | **Business as usual**   * Monitoring environmental conditions and individual responses * Continue to review advice from ESO * **Postpone whole school prolonged outdoor physical activity including swimming and sports carnivals\*** | **Reduce prolonged or heavy physical activity and limit time spent outdoors**   * Reasonable adjustments to outdoor or physical activities including playground supervision adjustments and alternatives * Ensure internal teaching spaces are available * Monitor symptoms and manage as needed | **Business as usual**   * Monitoring environmental conditions and individual responses * Continue to review advice from ESO |
| **Moderate** | **Implement mitigations for sensitive groups and general** | **Avoid prolonged or heavy physical activity altogether**   * Limit time spent outdoors * Monitoring symptoms and implement controls from individual student plans and *First Aid Procedures* * Implement controls from school plan for *Managing Extreme Temperatures* * Review excursions for relevant controls * **Postpone all whole school prolonged physical activity including indoor swimming and sports carnivals\*** * Consider postponing all local off-site\*\* activities including excursions | **Reduce prolonged or heavy physical activity**   * Reasonable adjustments to outdoor or physical activities including structured and unstructured play * Make internal spaces available * Monitor symptoms and manage as needed * Advise ESO if you have concerns about the effectiveness of heat and air quality controls * **Postpone all whole school prolonged physical activity including indoor swimming and sports carnivals\*** | **Avoid any prolonged or heavy physical activity altogether**   * Limit time spent outdoors * Monitor symptoms and manage as needed * Implement controls from school plan for *Managing Extreme Temperatures* | **Reduce prolonged or heavy physical activity**   * Limit physical activity implementing appropriate controls * Review excursions for relevant controls\ * Implement controls from school plan for *Managing Extreme Temperatures* |
| **High** | **Refer to ESO and implement mitigations for all groups** | **Remain indoors and keep activity as low as possible**   * Limit time spent outside to transitions only * Monitoring symptoms and implement controls * Implement controls from school plan for *Managing Extreme Temperatures* * Communication to parents and carers | **Remain indoors and keep activity as low as possible**  **Avoid all physical activity outdoors**   * Do not deliver physical activity * Postpone all local off-site\*\* activities including excursions * Implement controls from school plan for *Managing Extreme Temperatures* * Enact whole school controls from risk assessment * Advise ESO when controls are inadequate * Communication to parents/carers (timing – using to forecasting) * For prolonged exposure, with ESO endorsement whole year groups or significant cohorts of students to not be in attendance to be endorsed by ESO prior to enactment | **Remain indoors and keep activity as low as possible**   * Limit time spent outside to transitions only * Monitoring symptoms and implement controls * Implement controls from school plan for *Managing Extreme Temperatures* * Access leave | **Remain indoors and keep activity as low as possible**  **Avoid all physical activity outdoors**   * Do not deliver physical activity * Implement controls from school plan for *Managing Extreme Temperatures* * Enact whole school controls from risk assessment * Advise ESO when controls are inadequate * Communication to parents/carers (timing – using to forecasting) * Monitoring of workloads to allow reprieve * Monitoring staff absences Monitoring of workloads to allow reprieve * Monitoring staff absences |