

Ventilation

As the ambient temperatures drop, it is important to ensure that all rooms continue to be adequately ventilated.

Adequate ventilation not only helps to prevent the transmission of viruses such as flu and COVID-19, by reducing the build-up of carbon dioxide, but it also makes the learning environment better and helps to improve the brain's ability to learn.

As energy costs have risen, there may be a temptation for schools to reduce ventilation in order to reduce heating costs. This, however, should be avoided and may well be a false economy if there is a viral outbreak. The use of carbon dioxide monitors, which should be available in schools, can help in finding the correct balance between heating and ventilation. Further guidance on ventilation can be found [here](#).

Air filtration can also be deployed to assist with ventilation and maintain temperatures in classrooms. Although air filters do not remove carbon dioxide, they can be very effective at removing pathogens and allergens from the air, at a relatively low cost. The NASUWT has produced joint guidance with the Hazards campaign on air filtration, which can be found [here](#).

Health and Safety Representatives should ensure that:

- carbon dioxide detectors are working and available/deployed in rooms;
- any rooms that cannot be adequately ventilated have air filters provided; and
- school leaders are aware of the benefits of both ventilation and air filtration, as described in the NASUWT guidance.

World Health Organization (WHO) Guidance on Mental Health at Work

The WHO has published useful guidance on work-related mental ill-health. This emphasises the importance of preventing work-related mental ill-health, not just treating the symptoms. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work#:~:text=15%25>. Health and Safety Representatives are encouraged to use this guidance in discussions with school leaders.

Radon

Radon is a colourless, odourless radioactive gas that occurs naturally in certain rocks. It is dangerous in high concentrations, as when the gas is breathed in, it can damage the lungs, leading to lung cancer. Radon causes around 1,000 deaths a year in the UK due to lung cancer.

Some areas are much more prone to radon gas than others, depending on the predominant bedrock. The areas at highest risk are:

In England: the South West, Cotswolds, East Midlands, Peak District, the Pennines, Yorkshire Dales and parts of Cumbria and Northumberland;

Most of Wales;

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Scotland: the Cairngorms to Aberdeenshire; and

Northern Ireland: Most western and southern areas.

A map of radon-affected areas can be found at: <https://www.ukradon.org/information/ukmaps>.

If your school is in a radon-affected area, Health and Safety Representatives should ensure that an assessment of the radon risk has been carried out by a competent person/organisation, and that any actions are carried out. If any rooms have a high concentration of radon, they should be taken out of use until remedial action is carried out.

If representatives have concerns, further advice should be obtained from the NASUWT.

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)

RAAC is a lightweight building material that was used extensively for roofing. Recently, there have been some sudden failures of RAAC roofs in schools that have led to the collapse of the roof. This has prompted the Department for Education (DfE) and Local Government Association (LGA) in England to issue a warning that all schools should check whether they have RAAC present, and if so ensure that a thorough survey is undertaken. The DfE also requires schools to complete an online survey. Further details can be found at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-planning/information-reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-raac>.

In the absence of guidance in Northern Ireland, as it likely that some schools in Northern Ireland will also have RAAC, Health and Safety Representatives should ensure that school leaders are aware of the DfE/LGA guidance and follow the required steps in ensuring any RAAC is safe.

Display Screen Equipment Regulations (DSER)

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations apply to workers who use DSE daily, for continuous periods of an hour or more. The use does not have to be in the workplace, as the DSER apply to those working at home. As such, teachers are highly likely to be classed as DSE users.

The DSER place a number of obligations on employers. The Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) specifies that they must:

- complete a DSE workstation assessment;
- reduce risks, including making sure workers take breaks from DSE work or do something different;
- provide an eye test if a worker asks for one; and
- provide training and information for workers.

The HSENI has extensive guidance on the DSER, which is available at: <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/working-safely-display-screen-equipment#toc-1>.

As teachers are highly likely to be classed as DSE users, all these requirements, including the entitlement to a free eye test, are pertinent. DSE use does not damage eyes; however, incorrect use of DSE or poorly designed workstations or work environments can lead to pain in necks, shoulders, backs, arms, wrists and hands, as well as fatigue and eye strain.

Health and Safety Representatives should ensure that members are aware of their rights under the DSER. If any members are prevented in securing their rights, further guidance should be obtained from the NASUWT.

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Governance and Health & Safety

For schools that have governing bodies, the governors have a key role in ensuring the school complies with its health and safety obligations. There should be a governor who has oversight for the health and safety. Ideally, the H&S Governor should also attend the school's H&S committee.

Where a school has a governing body, the Health and Safety Representatives should work with the Staff Governor to ensure:

- a named governor has oversight of health and safety;
- the H&S Governor has received adequate training to fulfil the role, or has sufficient experience/ qualifications; and
- the governing body exercises the appropriate level of challenge of the senior leadership regarding matters of health and safety.



E-mail: NorthernIreland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk
Website: www.nasuwt.org.uk