



ULSTER TEACHERS' UNION

HEALTH & SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

A guide for teachers.

INCLUDING CYBER-HARASSMENT, SCHOOL TRIPS AND THE
ADMINISTRATION OF MEDICINES.

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HEALTH & SAFETY: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Health and safety legislation affects every worker and pupil in every school. All users of school and college premises are covered by the **Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978**.

Every school should have a **Safety Committee** to oversee health and safety, and each union in the school should appoint a representative — in small schools, the unions may agree to appoint a joint rep. The full duties of the rep are set out on the UTU website and in the School Reps’ Handbook. In brief, the rep is there:

- To investigate potential hazards and examine the cause of accidents.
- To investigate complaints by colleagues.
- To make representations to employers on matters of concern.
- To carry out inspections of the premises.
- To represent colleagues in consultations on health and safety issues.

Time off for safety reps

Safety reps are entitled to paid time off to carry out their duties. Time off is not dependent on funding, and should be written into a teacher’s timetable in the same way as time for other responsibilities. As a guideline:

DUTY	SMALL SCHOOLS	LARGE SCHOOLS
Inspections	Half a day per term	A full day per term
Routine duties	One hour per week	Two hours per week

GOOD TO KNOW

The safety rep is **not** in any way legally responsible for hazards that are pointed out but not acted upon, or for hazards that could not be seen.

This guide covers some of the basics of health and safety in schools. Further information is available on the UTU website, in the School Reps’ Handbook, and by calling the UTU office.

ON THE MOVE

SCHOOL JOURNEYS

School visits are of great educational and social value, but teachers must ensure the highest standards of health and safety at every stage — and be aware of the stress involved in planning a trip, and whether it is essential to take it on.

The law expects a teacher to apply the same care they would for their own family, and to maintain supervision of pupils throughout the journey. Teachers must take all reasonable steps to avoid exposing children to foreseeable dangers, or to situations beyond what certain pupils can be expected to cope with.

No teacher should be expected to organise a trip without training, or guidance from experienced colleagues. Wherever possible, the organiser should make a preliminary visit to the destination, become familiar with the planned activities, and assess possible hazards.

Minimum supervision ratios

Staffing should reflect the age, sex and ability of the pupils. These are guideline **minimums**:

1 : 6

Years 1–3 (a higher ratio for pre-school)

1 : 10–15

Years 4–6

1 : 15–20

Year 7 onwards

RATIOS ARE A FLOOR, NOT A TARGET

These are the bare minimum — always aim higher where you can, and **definitely** higher for trips abroad and for hazardous activities. When planning a trip abroad, check the supervision ratios for **that** country, not this one. Specialist activities such as swimming, hill-walking, climbing or sailing should only take place with qualified instructors. All vehicles used — school, local authority or privately hired — must be fitted with seatbelts.

Parents should always be asked to sign a consent form early in the planning stages, and should be made completely aware of the nature of the activity.

Inclusion

Every effort should be made to include all pupils regardless of ability. Disability legislation requires “reasonable adjustments” to be investigated to enable the participation of pupils with disabilities. Teachers may, however, decide to exclude a pupil whose poor behaviour would constitute a safety risk. Further guidance is available from UTU.

CARE & TREATMENT

ADMINISTRATION OF MEDICINES

Schools should have a clear policy on medicines, and an individual health-care plan for each child who requires medication. Where medication is needed during the day, some pupils may be able to self-administer; otherwise, arrangements should be made with parents and/or medical staff.

- Teachers should **never** administer non-prescribed medicines.
- Only prescribed medicines should be brought into school, held in a safe place and a safe container, and never accessible to other pupils.
- Medicines for emergency treatment (epipens, inhalers and so on) should **not** be locked away, but kept accessible to those who need them.

IN AN EMERGENCY

In the case of an anaphylactic reaction a teacher may choose to use an epipen — it is safe, and it is impossible to administer an overdose — but is under no obligation to do so. **An ambulance must be summoned in all emergency situations.**

First aid

There is no absolute requirement to have a first aider in a school, but there must be an “**Appointed Person**”. This person is not necessarily trained in first aid, but takes overall control of the first-aid equipment, knows the emergency procedures for summoning an ambulance, and reports accidents.

A teacher cannot be required to be a first aider unless it is contractual. Whether voluntary or contractual, a first aider must be trained, and should be released from classes occasionally to maintain equipment. Think carefully before volunteering — teachers of practical subjects or PE, for example, can rarely leave their classes unsupervised.

A GENERAL PRINCIPLE

In an emergency it is generally better for a teacher to offer some form of first aid than to leave the child. Further guidance is available from UTU.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

ACCIDENTS & REPORTING

It is essential that all accidents are reported and investigated, so that hazards can be eliminated in future. All accidents, however trivial, should be recorded — injuries that seem minor at the time may have more serious long-term consequences.

THE TEN-EMPLOYEE RULE

It is a legal requirement to record accidents in any workplace with **ten or more employees**. Even in the smallest schools, once lunchtime supervisors, classroom assistants and admin staff are counted, that threshold is almost always met.

If you have an accident

- Make a precautionary visit to your GP and have the accident recorded.
- Take photographs of the injury and of the place where it happened — these are a great help if a claim for compensation should follow.
- Record assaults — physical **and** verbal — in the same way as accidents. Stress can be an industrial accident.

“Near miss” accidents

Near misses should be reported too, so that appropriate action can be taken. Falling roof tiles, uneven paving and insecure carpets could all be near-miss accidents.

Following an accident, the employer should investigate the cause and take steps to prevent a recurrence. Union safety reps have a legal right to inspect the site of an accident and make recommendations.

WHEN TO CALL UTU

If an accident to a UTU member is serious, the member should contact Headquarters for advice and assistance — and should also contact Headquarters if remedial action is not taken following an accident.

Playground accidents to pupils from slips, trips or falls are not reportable beyond being recorded in the school's accident book — unless the accident requires professional medical care, or arose in connection with construction work on the site, the condition of the premises, or the level of supervision.

ONLINE SAFETY

CYBER-HARASSMENT

Cyber-harassment is a growing concern for teachers. To protect yourself as far as possible, follow the guidance below.

- **Know your school's mobile phone and internet policies**, and enforce them consistently.
- **Avoid giving out your personal mobile number** to parents or pupils — it helps if this is built into your school policy.
- **Never discuss school-related issues** on social networking sites.
- **Avoid having parents or pupils as friends** on social networking sites.
- **Always think before you post** anything personal or professional. Once it's out, you can't take it back.
- **Advise your friends to think before they post**, as your professional reputation could be at risk.
- **Know your privacy settings** and how they work.
- **Above all, tell your Principal of any incident, however small.** You won't know if a problem is developing unless you keep track.

YOU'RE NOT ON YOUR OWN

If you are being harassed online in connection with your work, keep a record of everything and contact UTU. We can advise and support you.

EXPECTING & NEW PARENTS

MATERNITY & NEW MOTHERS

As soon as a teacher informs her employer of her pregnancy, a risk assessment should be carried out to ensure the safety of both her and the unborn child. The following should be considered:

- Has **fatigue** been addressed? Classes or duties may be reallocated, evening meetings suspended, and cover of classes with disruptive pupils not required.
- Is there somewhere to **lie down** if necessary?
- Is classroom **seating** appropriate? Teachers should not be required to use child-sized seating.
- Has she been offered help with **lifting and carrying**?
- Is there any possibility she has been exposed to **Rubella**? If so, has she been advised to see her GP?
- In practical subjects, have measures been taken to protect her from **chemicals, solvents and cleaning agents**?
- Where a child could be disruptive, is she **protected** from them?

INFECTION RISKS

Other diseases during pregnancy — chickenpox, parvovirus, cytomegalovirus, and in rural areas chlamydia psittaci (caught from sheep) — can pose a risk to mother and child. The pregnant teacher should be aware of the risks and seek medical advice if exposure is suspected.

Returning to work

After giving birth — especially after a short maternity leave — a teacher should still be provided with proper seating, a rest place, and, if necessary, somewhere to express and store milk. If she is returning following a Caesarean birth, care should be taken over lifting, carrying and standing for excessive periods.

Toilet provision

Toilet provision is particularly important. In brief, the guidelines are:

EMPLOYEES ON THE PREMISES	TOILETS & WASHROOMS
1 – 5	1
6 – 25	2
26 – 50	3

Female and male employees should have their own provision, unless all facilities are of the washroom type, and staff facilities should be separate from those used by pupils — the only exception being disabled facilities, which may be shared by staff, pupils and visitors as necessary. Further guidance is available from UTU.

IN BRIEF

SOME OTHER CONCERNS

Heating

Guideline minimum temperatures are **18°C** for classrooms, **15°C** where physical activity takes place, and **21°C** for sick bays. Principals have the power to close all or part of a school if these temperatures are not met, although parents must be notified. Where problems are long-standing, the safety rep should establish what remedial action is being taken.

Swimming

Unless the services of a qualified lifeguard are used, non-specialist teachers of swimming should hold, at minimum, a current lifesaving qualification and a basic swimming-teaching qualification. Teachers should not be expected to take on activities that expose them, or their pupils, to undue risk.

Teachers' vehicles

Even where a teacher has adequate insurance, they **cannot be directed** to carry pupils in their own vehicle. There are specific rules on insuring vehicles for “business use” — driving to INSET training, between schools or sites, to work-related meetings, or undertaking duties as a union officer — so check carefully with your insurer that you are covered. There is no automatic right to park on school premises, and there is little likelihood of compensation if your vehicle is damaged on school property: parking is at the teacher's own risk.

Lifting & handling

Lifting or handling heavy loads — or even pupils, except in an emergency — is **not** part of a teacher's role. While teachers are expected to carry light loads as part of everyday work, heavy loads should be the responsibility of premises or other contracted staff, and a teacher should not lift or carry a load that could cause injury. Teachers who are pregnant or who have a disability should be given special consideration.

Asbestos

TREAT AS URGENT

Asbestos in schools remains an ongoing concern, and the law requires action to identify and deal with suspected asbestos. It is still present in some pipe and boiler laggings, wall spaces, ceiling and wall panels, and some science labs. If you suspect asbestos in your school, the safety rep should seek guidance on how it is to be dealt with **as a matter of urgency**.

And finally...

This is a brief guide only. Staff at UTU Headquarters can give more detailed advice on any of the topics here — and on many that aren't, for example:

[Risk assessments](#)[Construction work](#)[Safety inspections](#)[Stress](#)[Security & violence](#)

[Fire safety](#)[Emergency procedures](#)[Work equipment](#)[Computers](#)[Practical lessons](#)[Electrical safety](#)[Voice & eye care](#)[Infectious diseases](#)

TALK TO US

Look out for health and safety updates on the UTU website, in the School Reps' Handbook, and through training offered by UTU.

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