Attachment 1

CATHOLIC EDUCATION
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

School Operating Guidelines

Hot Weather Plan

ADVICE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS & CARE SERVICES

Effective February 2024

Background

Extreme heat or heat wave is a period of unusual and uncomfortable hot weather that can negatively affect health. Children and young people are more susceptible to heat stress. For this reason, schools must be able to recognise and respond to heat related illness and have strategies to manage the risks associated with extreme hot weather and heat wave.

Schools must:

- be able to recognise and treat heat related illness.
- have strategies in place to manage the risks associated with periods of extreme heat, including early intervention, prevention and preparedness measures, as outlined below.

The decision to close a school is made by the Principal after consultation with their School Improvement Advisor or Regional Officer, and approved by a member of the CEWA Executive Team.

If the Principal holds concern regarding the health and safety of staff and students, they should contact the Work Health and Safety Team at CEWA to consider appropriate actions.

Being prepared

It is important that school staff know the signs and symptoms of heat stress and how to respond. Treatment options vary according to the type of heat-related illness.

If a student, staff member or visitor shows any sign of heat exhaustion or heatstroke, schools must apply first aid and seek medical assistance immediately.

Some heat-related illnesses and common symptoms include:

- deterioration in existing medical conditions.
- heat stress - including dehydration, heat rash and heat cramps (muscle pains or spasms).
- dizziness and fainting.
- heat exhaustion - warning signs may include paleness and sweating, rapid heart rate, muscle cramps headache, nausea and vomiting, dizziness or fainting.
- heatstroke - the person may stagger, appear confused, have a fit, collapse and become unconscious. This is a medical emergency and requires urgent attention.

For more information please refer to the Healthy WA Website: Heatwaves – [be prepared for extreme heat (healthywa.wa.gov.au)]

Extreme heat

During a period of extreme heat schools should actively:

Communicate early

- Notify parents/carers about upcoming weather conditions and remind them to provide their child with extra water and icepacks in lunch boxes.

Review and make adjustments to school operations

- Review timetabled activities and duty rosters prior to the commencement of the school day and modify any activity that could add to heat related illness of staff and students.
- Reconsider events (such as assemblies) where adequate shade is not able to be provisioned for students, staff and visitors.
- Keep all students inside during break and eating times.
- Limit outside play and provide alternative inside activities during break times.
- Review and modify duty rosters to limit staff exposure to heat.
- Postpone any planned vigorous activity.
- Modify physical education lessons and not undertake them outside.
- Postpone athletics and swimming carnivals.
- Allow drink bottles in classrooms, including the provision of additional water bottles.
- Rotate class use of air conditioned facilities where available.

In-term swimming:

- Where the on-site location has minimal shade (e.g. beaches), Principals should make an assessment on whether in-term swimming should go ahead.
- Considerations should include:
  - the availability of sufficient shade;
  - the temperature at the location;
  - the length of the lesson;
  - the time of day the lesson is scheduled; and
  - the age of the students.

Consider adjustments to the physical space

- Close any internal and external blinds.
- Use portable shade structures where possible.
- Utilise large industrial fans and ensure indoor spaces have open doors and windows or air conditioning during activities.
- Use fans or other devices (wet flannels) in an appropriate way to remain cool.

Educate, prepare and monitor staff and students

- Display heat guidelines and charts in prominent locations in the school for reminders about hydration and symptoms.
- Educate and encourage students and school staff to stay hydrated.
- Conduct a briefing of staff who provision first aid on the symptoms of and response to heat related illness.
- Conduct walk-throughs and check ins with staff and students to monitor impact of heat.
- Review first aid kits and consider the inclusion of additional ice packs and hydrolytes.
- Establish sunscreen stations for staff and students.
- Review students with known medical conditions and triage support for those more likely to be impacted by the heat.
- In consultation with staff who work outside (e.g. gardeners/physical education teachers), reallocate their duties.
- For further information about best practice in sun safety, please refer to: SunSmart schools - Cancer Council WA (cancerwa.asn.au).

Responding

In the event of a disruption to essential services that impact the ability for the school to operate, the principal should contact CEWA Crisis Line on (08) 9380 1600. In the event a school does have to reduce the number of students or staff attending school or close for any duration for health or safety reasons this will require the school to contact the CEWA Crisis Line and a Reportable Incident Form to be completed.

Power reduction strategies

During times of high heat where schools may need to reduce their power load, some points to consider and actions to take are as follows.

Reverse cycle air conditioners

For schools with reverse cycle air conditioners, consider raising the temperature of the system if this can be locally controlled. Raising the temperature that the air conditioner is attempting to cool the room will reduce the power draw. Air conditioners should be preset to only allow the temperature to be varied from 21–23˚C. In this case, raise the temperature to 23˚C. If possible, raising the temperature higher (e.g. to 26˚C) will further reduce power draw.

Evaporative cooling systems

Evaporative coolers are less effective in high humidity and at high temperatures (typically above 38˚C). For improved efficiency, ensure windows are slightly open to push out hot air.

Consider using fans instead of air conditioners.

If the air conditioner can be controlled locally, change to fan only mode and consider using pedestal or ceiling fans if available.

Stagger air conditioner use.

Use of air conditioners could be staggered around different areas of the school to reduce the power draw at any one time.

Consider turning off non-essential electrical equipment.

This should be considered on a case-by-case basis but may include:

- preferencing paper-based work to reduce use of computers.
- turning off unused/non-essential computers.
- turning off fridges that are not currently being used.
- turning off electric resistive hot water units if non-essential.
- turning off any non-essential pool heat pumps if present.
- preferencing theory lessons in food technology classes in place of cooking.