

Slips, Trips & Falls



Schools have a legal and moral duty to protect employees, students, visitors, volunteers, contractors and other persons from injuries due to slips, trips and falls.

- Slips occur when a person's foot loses traction with the floor. The most common causes are slippery floor surfaces (e.g. highly polished, wet or greasy), slippery external areas (e.g. moss, rain, ice, gravel), and inappropriate footwear.
- Tripping occurs when a person unexpectedly catches their foot. In most instances, the objects people trip on are small and unobtrusive, such as cracks in the floor or electrical leads, loose cables, poor housekeeping, school bags in hallways, rugs or mats – especially with upturned corners.
- Falls can result from a slip or trip, but many occur during falls from low heights, such as steps, stairs, slopes, changes of level and curbs.

Slips, trips and falls can result in fractures, dislocations and muscular skeletal disorders. They cause over 20 per cent of injuries in schools. In addition to worker compensation claims, they can result in common law actions against a school when a student, contractor or visitor is seriously injured.

The more risk factors at your school the greater the chance that somebody will slip, trip or fall and injure themselves.

Reducing the risk of slips, trips and falls

To control the risk of slips, trips and falls, it is advisable to:

- avoid changes of level and slopes through good design and purchasing practices;
- plan pedestrian and traffic routes to avoid overcrowding;
- choose suitable floor surfaces and avoid smooth floors in areas that will become wet or contaminated such as kitchens and hallways;
- note that steps with irregular heights or depths and single steps of less than 150 mm in height are particularly dangerous;
- be aware that a person is most likely to slip or fall from the bottom step of a stairway;
- improve visibility where there are slopes, small or irregular steps and changes of level with hand rails, yellow lines, floor markings, etc;
- ensure lighting levels are adequate;
- ensure mats are securely fixed and do not have curling edges;
- ensure cables are not placed where people can trip over them;
- ensure that school bags, musical instruments, electrical leads and sports equipment is not left on the floor where people can trip over them;



- ensure regular cleaning, housekeeping and promptly mop up spills;
- be aware that new cleaning chemicals (especially when there is a new cleaning contractor) can alter the coefficient of friction and result in surfaces becoming more slippery and dangerous;
- have arrangements for wet weather when people trail water into the school creating slip hazards;
- especially on slippery surfaces such as tiles and vinyl;
- maintain areas and promptly carry out any maintenance work that needs to be done;
- reduce the risk of creating additional slip or trip hazards during cleaning, maintenance and building works;
- regularly check floors, paths and other surfaces for loose stones, holes, cracks, etc;
- grind down or paint yellow stripes onto the joints;
- of concrete paths which move up and down during climate variations;
- keep work areas tidy and store items away from walk areas;
- warn people about obstructions that cannot be removed by installing signs or barriers;
- promote the use of sensible, slip-resistant footwear and discouraging the use of thongs, slippers, high heels, etc.

Monitoring and reviewing the risk of slips, trips and falls

To monitor and review the risk of slips, trips and falls:

- keep records of where people slip, trip and fall throughout the school so that hazardous areas can be identified and then dealt with;
- regularly inspect the school and address any problems in a timely and efficient manner:
 - school specific checklists can be developed to assist with the inspections;
 - the intervals between school inspections will be determined for the different areas of the school, the greater the risk in an area the more often it will need to be inspected;
 - this also applies to seasonal variations such as autumn when there may be slippery leaves on paths;
- keeping records of inspections and maintenance work carried out;
- discuss slips, trips and falls issues at staff meetings and record details in minutes.

Chairs and stools with castors

Chairs and stools with castors on slippery surfaces such as vinyl and tiles can cause compound fractures when people sit down and the chair or stool tips or shoots away from underneath them. This problem can be managed by replacing the castors with glides or by purchasing special friction castors.



Falls from a height

Falls from a height result in many serious injuries in schools. This typically happens when people are hanging up student work, posters, signs, banners, fixing blinds, changing light bulbs, cleaning windows, removing cobwebs, etc.

These tasks are particularly dangerous when using improvised items such as chairs, tables, milk crates, stools, window sills, boxes, shelving or benches.

Falls from a height can also occur when people are installing or adjusting overhead projectors, setting up for theatre productions, etc.

Where possible this work should be done from ground level. If this cannot be done, such work should only be done by trained people using proper equipment such as sturdy stepladders with wide treads. Inappropriate or damaged stepladders should be destroyed or removed from the school.

Working at heights of two metres or more

Working at heights of two metres or more in schools is not covered within the scope of this section of the training material. However, such high risk work should only be done by suitably qualified trades people or contractors with appropriate equipment, written procedures and an emergency rescue plan.

If a fatal accident was to occur at a school it would most likely involve somebody falling off a roof while trying to retrieve a ball or climbing a ladder to clean gutters, etc.

Summary

Slips, Trips and Falls summary

The more risk factors that you have at your school, the greater the chance that somebody will slip, trip or fall and injure themselves. A school can be made safer by checking the school grounds and inside the school on a regular basis and dealing with any problems promptly, particularly during wet weather and icy conditions. It is advisable to ensure:

- mats are securely fixed and do not have curling edges
- cables are not placed where people can trip over them
- regular cleaning, housekeeping and that spills are mopped up promptly.

Falls from a height result in many serious injuries in schools. This typically happens when people are hanging up student work, posters, signs, banners, fixing blinds, changing light bulbs, cleaning windows, removing cobwebs, etc.

Where possible this work should be done from ground level. If this cannot be done, such work should only be done by trained staff using proper equipment such as sturdy stepladders with wide treads. Inappropriate or damaged stepladders should be replaced.

Working at a height of two metres or more should only be done by suitably qualified trades people or contractors with appropriate equipment, written safe work procedures and an emergency rescue plan.

Resources

- The WorkSafe Victoria website has a section dedicated to slips, trips and falls. This page also has a link to a variety of checklists to help you assess a variety of slips, trips and fall hazards. These checklists can be downloaded and printed individually. <www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/wps/>



wcm/connect/wsinternet/WorkSafe/Home/Safety+and+Prevention/Health+And+Safety+Topics/Slips+Trips+and+Falls>.

Further assistance

- *You can contact the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) on 03 9267 0228*
- *or visit <www.cecv.catholic.edu.au> for advice, safety guidelines, checklists, online resources and other information on safety matters relevant to Catholic schools.*
- *The CECV Occupational Health and Safety Policy and Guidelines are available from <http://web.cecv.catholic.edu.au/vcsa/ohands/guidelines/guidelines_index.htm>.*