

Footwear and safety at work

Our feet bear the brunt of many health and safety incidents and can be injured sufficiently to leave us unable to work for some time. We can place our health and safety at risk because we do not wear the most suitable footwear for the activities we are performing at school.

Schools are unique workplaces that include a range of environments – from classrooms to sporting fields – and host a broad variety of activities. Consequently, every campus presents a range of risks to staff and students. The school principal, leadership team, workplace health and safety committee, Health and Safety Advisor (HSA) and all staff should work together to identify and manage these risks. This includes identifying appropriate footwear to prevent injuries associated with activities that are undertaken.

What are the risks of wearing inappropriate shoes at school?

Injuries to feet:

- Fractures and bruises from being struck by objects, kicking objects or being stood on by someone
- Crush injuries from objects falling or being dropped on to our feet
- Penetration wounds from sharp objects being stood on or dropping onto feet
- Burns from chemical spills
- Heat burns from hot liquids or solids.

Injuries sustained from slips, trips and falls:

- Sprains, strains, bruises and fractures – can range from minor to serious.
- A common contributing factor to slips, trips or falls is inappropriate footwear. Slippery soles, poorly secured shoes (e.g. thongs or ill-fitting sandals/scuffs), loose soles or laces, unstable heels or unsecured tongues can result in slip, trip and fall injuries. Wearing safe, supportive shoes is a good way of preventing falls and keeping feet healthy.

What can we do to minimise the risk?

Footwear which is suitable for the general school environment means enclosed shoes, which are flat shoes or shoes with a minimal heel that have a good grip and fit well.

All staff need to assess their tasks for the day and chose footwear that is suitable for the activities they will be undertaken. Appropriate footwear for the following activities and environments should be carefully considered:

- practical activities (e.g. industrial design and technology/manual arts, art, home economics, science, agricultural studies, sport and physical education)
- playground duty
- wet environments
- all sporting activities
- uneven ground levels, sloping ground surfaces, loose ground surfaces
- frequent use of stairs, particularly where items are being carried while using the stairs
- potential for sudden changes of direction (e.g. in response to unpredictable behaviour of student)
- frequent manual handling.

Appropriate safe footwear may also be identified as a requirement in relation to other areas or activities, documented procedure or a documented risk assessment. For example, in work situations where floors can't always be kept dry or clean, the right footwear is especially important, so a slip resistant shoe may be required.