Slips, Trips and Falls
NEU guidance for reps and local officers

This briefing provides NEU guidance on taking action in schools to reduce the incidence of accidents and injuries due to slips, trips and falls. It includes the legal requirements on employers, practical steps which can be taken, and sources of further advice and information.

How great is the problem?
Slips, trips and falls on the same level are the major single cause of injury in schools and colleges to both employees and students.

- Slips and trips are the most common cause of injury at work, accounting for around 30 per cent of all reported major injuries.
- Slips and trips injuries also constitute the largest single category of personal injury cases pursued by the NEU.
- The most common causes of these accidents are substances on the floor followed by obstructions in traffic routes.

Each year slips and trips cause approximately 111,000 major injuries in the workplace (source: Labour Force Survey).

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that slips, trips and falls result in an annual 1.5 million working days lost, and the estimated costs of these accidents to the UK economy are £800 million, with employers facing an annual bill of £500 million.

What causes slip and trip accidents?
There are a number of reasons why slip and trip accidents occur. Slips can be caused by factors such as spillages of wet and dry substances on floors, flooring which is uneven or not slip-resistant, and poor lighting in an area making it difficult to see hazards. Trips are often caused by obstructions in walkways followed by uneven surfaces.

Human factors are a major contributory cause of such accidents. Workplaces often have a poor perception of slip and trip risks, failing to identify, report and manage them effectively.

What HSE inspectors expect to find
While HSE inspectors do not routinely visit schools, they have the ability to do so when required. When visiting workplaces, HSE inspectors expect to find a robust management system, which identifies slip and trip problems and employs control measures to avoid such hazards. The employer must ensure that a risk assessment has been carried out, which highlights how the workplace can best prevent such accidents. They also look for a positive commitment to the issue, and a demonstration that slip and trip risks are taken seriously at all levels of an organisation.

The HSE provides a ‘hazard spotting checklist’ which may be useful for employers when carrying out risk assessments, and for safety representatives when carrying out their own inspections. It is available at: hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck4.pdf

The HSE operates a ‘fee for intervention’ scheme, whereby duty holders found to be in ‘material breach’ of the law will be responsible for covering the costs of any work carried out
for them by the HSE. The hourly rate is charged at £129, so any schools found to be not complying with health and safety law may receive a substantial bill.

**What the law says**

Employers’ duties under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to undertake risk assessments include the duty to identify, assess and control slips and trips risks on their premises. This duty applies both to risks to employees and risks to other people, including pupils, contractors and visitors. Education employers need to be able to show that they have considered the risks and instituted effective control measures.

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 contain specific requirements upon employers relating to the condition of floors and traffic routes which complement the risk assessment provisions outlined above. Regulation 12(3) specifies that “so far as is reasonably practicable, every floor in a workplace and the surface of every traffic route in a workplace shall be kept free from obstructions and from any article or substance which may cause a person to slip, trip or fall”. Regulation 9 further specifies that workplaces should be kept clean and free of obstructions.

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, employers are required to ensure the health and safety of all employees, and anyone who might be affected by their work, so far as is reasonably practical. This includes ensuring measures are taken to control slip and trip risks.

Employers are also required under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 to consult trade union safety representatives on health and safety matters. Safety representatives must also be given access to information relevant to the health and safety of the workers they represent, including any information relating to potentially hazardous conditions, such as slip and trip risks.

**Taking action on slips and trips**

The NEU and HSE share the view that the main obstacle to reducing the number of slips and trips accidents is the fact that the risks are not taken seriously. There is often an unfortunate but misplaced sense of inevitability about such accidents, leading to poor management control of this hazard. While such accidents are often viewed as likely to be trivial, they can result in permanent disability or even death in some cases. They can also impose significant costs upon employers, such as those detailed above for HSE intervention.

The cost of safety precautions should not be viewed as an obstacle to taking necessary action to tackle the risks of slip and trip accidents. The NEU and HSE both emphasise that many effective preventative measures can be instituted without great expense. Some potential control measures, such as installation of slip resistant floor surfaces, may be expensive. Raising awareness among employees and students, and instituting proper procedures for routine cleaning of floors and cleaning up of spillages, adequate lighting and wearing of sensible footwear are, however, easily achieved.

**Cleaning**

As noted above, the most common cause of accidents is the presence of substances on the floor, which cause slips. Detailed procedures therefore need to be in place for identifying, reporting and cleaning up spillages as well as for carrying out routine cleaning of floors.

Procedures need to consider, and protect against, all the potential risks which can arise. For example, recently mopped floors can be as slippery as significantly wet floors. It is, therefore, important to ensure that floors are given time to dry before people are allowed to walk on them or, at the very least, that warnings remain in place. Equally, it is important to avoid over-polishing of floor surfaces.

_Slips, Trips and Falls_
In some areas where spillages are particularly likely, however, it may be appropriate to provide safety floor surfaces in order to reduce the risks of slips and trips further. The HSE’s Approved Code of Practice to the 1992 regulations states that “a slip resistant coating should be applied where necessary” (paragraph 93).

**Removing obstructions**
The next most common cause of accidents is the presence of obstructions on traffic routes such as external pathways, internal corridors, or routes within classrooms, dining rooms and other areas.

Obvious practical measures will include procedures to identify and deal with hazards such as broken or damaged floor surfaces and to remove problems such as snow or ice on external pathways. Other steps could include the provision of more storage facilities, which may reduce the likelihood of pedestrians tripping over coats and bags, boxes or other material obstructing their passage.

**Footwear**
Footwear plays an important role in preventing slip incidents. Policies encouraging employees to wear suitable footwear have been shown to be highly effective in reducing slip and trip injuries. Such policies should cover all staff and pupils.

**Lighting**
Adequate and appropriate lighting also plays an important role in preventing slips and trips. Poor lighting can obscure slip and trip hazards, while excessively bright or incorrectly placed lights can be equally hazardous.

**Reporting and investigating accidents**
Where accidents do occur, it is essential that they are immediately reported to the school’s management and that the causes of every accident are investigated. In this way, lessons can be learned for the future, and steps can be taken to improve procedures and precautions where appropriate. Safety reps may also wish to exercise their statutory rights to investigate health and safety issues where accidents occur. Near misses should also be reported and investigated in order to prevent future incidents occurring.

**HSE guidance**
The HSE website – hse.gov.uk – contains a wealth of information resources and case studies on this topic. There is specific information on slips and trips in education, available at: hse.gov.uk/services/education/slips-in-education.htm
The HSE has also published guidance on preventing slips and trips at work, available at: hse.gov.uk/services/education/slips-in-education.htm

**Action points for safety reps**
Safety representatives are asked to ensure that:
1. staff members are aware of the most common slip and trip hazards and of ways in which slip and trip risks can easily be minimised;
2. appropriate measures are in place in the school to reduce slip and trip accidents, and that procedures are known to all staff and pupils;
3. appropriate arrangements are also in place for the reporting and investigation of accidents which do occur.

Safety representatives are also encouraged to circulate the slip and trip checklist - attached as Appendix 1 - to staff in their school, in order to:
• raise awareness of the issues
• assist in the process of gathering key data on slip and trip hazards in their school.

*Slips, Trips and Falls*
Appendix 1

NEU slips and trips self-assessment checklist
Note to safety reps - please detach top section prior to copying to third parties.

Dear Colleague,

Please help to assess your classroom’s level of slip and trip risks by allocating scores in each of the boxes below according to the criteria specified, and then totalling the score.

Rank the following from 1 to 5: 1=True, 2=Mostly true, 3=Partially true, 4=Generally untrue, 5=False

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slips and Trips</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The floor in my classroom has good slip-resistance throughout</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are no worn, dirty, over-polished or damaged areas of flooring or floor surfaces prone to slipperiness at certain times (e.g. wet weather)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any spillages (wet or dry) are cleaned up promptly</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment is set up to minimise the risk of trailing cables</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>My classroom has sufficient space and is well laid out with good storage facilities</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic routes in my classroom are not obstructed by displays, pupils’ bags or other articles</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suitable footwear is worn by both pupils and staff</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The classroom is well lit throughout</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet items, e.g. coats, are hung up above slip-resistant flooring</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At entry points into my building there are effective doormats and slip-resistant floor surfaces</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name
Classroom

Slips, Trips and Falls
Slips, Trips and Falls

Total

Risk factors
Up to 15 points – Low
16-29 points – Medium
30-50 points – High

Please add any further comments which need urgent attention in your classroom, eg ‘broken floor tile just inside classroom door’