Safeguarding at events – weather considerations

Introduction

Most large events are planned many months in advance. If all, or part, of the event is outdoors, then contingency or cancellation procedures should be in place in case the weather is unsuitable. In addition, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has shown that there may be other reasons for cancelling or rescheduling events.

This briefing paper focuses on the issues arising from bad weather – prior to and during an event – to assist in your decision-making. Principally, about whether the activity should take place and what arrangements should be in place if events have to be cancelled.

This guidance focusses on events held on dry land. Links to information and guidance about water-based sports are provided at the end of this document.

Note: The terms 'child' and 'young person' describe any person under the age of 18. References to 'parents' should be read as parents and carers inclusively.

Pre-event information

Regularly check weather forecasts in the days leading up to an event. Ensure that in any pre-event information it is clear what clothing and kit is needed, preparing for all weathers.

This should include:

- ✓ appropriate sports kit
- ✓ cover up clothing (for walking around venues or waiting for transport)
- ✓ waterproofs
- ✓ correct footwear
- ✓ sun hats
- ✓ sunscreen*
- ✓ refreshments (food and drink) for the day

* Young people should be encouraged to bring their own sunscreen to ensure they bring something appropriate for their circumstances or any allergies.

Cancelling prior to the start of an event

Bearing in mind that people could be travelling some distance, incurring transport costs, and may have cancelled childcare arrangements, the earlier an event is cancelled (or at least a warning is given about potential cancellation) the better. However, this is balanced with the potential of cancelling too early and the weather turning out to be fine. Ultimately, the safety and welfare of those involved in the event is the priority.

Establish what contingency arrangements could be planned and implemented in the event of bad weather. For example, could all or some activities be moved indoors, or is there shelter available for participants and staff in the event of shorter periods of bad weather?

During the event

Organisers should always be aware that despite the best intentions an event may go ahead only for the weather to intervene on the day. Planning for bad weather should always be part of the pre-event considerations.

In the worst-case scenario, be clear who has the final decision as to whether a specific activity (or the entire event) goes ahead. Always bear in mind whose event it is and who has ultimate responsibility for the welfare of participants

Indoor and outdoor activities

Depending or where activities are being held, an event may still be able to go ahead. If some activities are indoors, these may be able to continue despite the weather. If outdoor activities are cancelled, various options should be considered:

- Can they be moved indoors?
- Is there venue capacity indoors for people to be able to at least shelter comfortably even if they cannot undertake the activity?
- If they are sheltering, how will you keep young people entertained? Quizzes, music and games are some ideas.
- How long will they have to wait before transport (either parents or central transport) arrives to take them home? Discuss this with any transport providers ahead of the event.
- If children leave early on event-organised transport, will they be safely collected at the other end if parents are at work?
- How will you ensure that young people are properly supervised and that there is the correct transfer of duty of care when they leave the venue or arrive early at a pre-agreed transport drop-off point?

Storms

In the event of thunder and lightning, or extreme winds and rain, outside activity should stop and people ushered to a safe place. An area where people can shelter safely should be identified prior to the event.

If the weather makes activity unsafe, the activity should be abandoned. Weather conditions need also to be considered when young people are leaving the event.

Hot weather

If the event is outside in open spaces with little or no existing shelter, organisers should consider how people will be able to have time out of the sun. For example, hire or buy some gazebos to provide shade if there are no suitable alternatives on-site.

Some sun safety recommendations include:

- between 11am and 3pm it is especially important to spend time in the shade
- encourage regular application of sunscreen to avoid sunburn*
- people should not spend longer in the sun because they are wearing sunscreen
- cover up with suitable clothing and wear sunglasses
- drinking water should be available, although people should have been encouraged in the pre-event information to bring their own

- activity and team leaders should reinforce key message throughout the day – such as to keep hydrated, stay in the shade and apply sunscreen
- if any general announcements are made during the event, key messages about keeping hydrated should be included

* Organisers may consider providing sunscreen for anyone who failed to bring their own, but must be aware of possible allergies. Use factor 30 sunscreen as a minimum.

Resources

Hot weather and sun protection

Outdoor Kids Sun Safety Code – Melanoma Fund

Heatwave: looking after yourself and others during hot weather – the latest advice (PDF) – NHS

Beat the heat: coping with heat and COVID-19 (PDF) – Public Health England

Events taking place on the water

A number of sports bodies have developed information and guidance. Examples include:

Checking weather and shipping forecasts – RYA

Paddlesafer (PDF) – British Canoeing

Open water swimming

Guidance on weather considerations is included as part of safe event information provided by these organisations:

Open water swimming safety guide for multi-sport events (PDF; p17) – British Triathlon

COVID-19 guidance to open water swimmers (PDF; p4) – SH_2OUT

Further information

Information and resources related to this topic are available by searching for 'events' on the CPSU website, **thecpsu.org.uk**. These include:

- safer events briefings and podcasts
- event-planning tools and checklists
- additional safeguarding concerns
- reporting procedures
- advice for event staff
- sample forms and templates

