



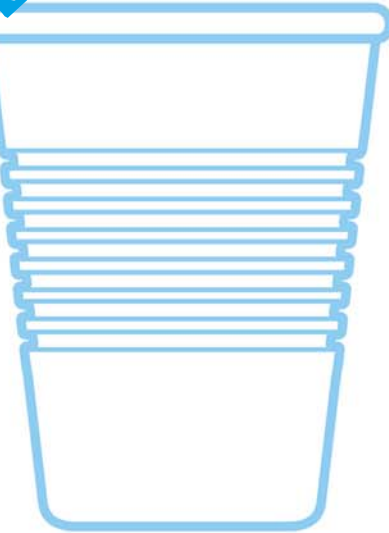
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**drinking water in schools guidance**

# Drinking Water in Schools Guidance

Highland is committed to improving the health of Highland's children and young people. The availability of free accessible drinking water in schools is an initiative to encourage an increase the water consumption by pupils and thereby improve health in the long and short term.

Many schools in Highland have already experienced the benefits of providing easily accessible water through water-bottles on desks which use mains water from taps or water coolers. Positive benefits have been reported by these schools.

Children need to drink at least 3-4 glasses of water per day while at school and even more when exercising or in warm weather. Water needs to be conveniently located in safe and hygienic locations, be attractive to children in terms of taste and temperature, and children need to be encouraged and supported to drink water throughout the day.

Children will achieve more when their health and learning needs are met. The provision of water supports health and well being through a health promoting schools approach and links well with learning programmes such as thinking skills and accelerated learning.

## The links between drinking more water and health

- The body cannot store water and is continually using and losing it.
- The situation is more critical to children because their relatively active lifestyle and large body surface area relative to weight can result in a proportionally higher and more rapid fluid loss than adults.
- Children and adults need to be encouraged to drink when and ideally before they are thirsty – the sensation of thirst is not triggered until dehydration is already well established.
- Children and adults need to get into the habit of drinking water throughout the day as drinking patterns are established in childhood.
- An insufficient fluid intake during the day can reduce bladder capacity so that a child's bladder may not be able to cope with an increase of fluids in the evening. This may increase the risk of bed-wetting.
- A low fluid intake during the day is a contributory factor in constipation.

## The links between drinking more water and learning

- Mental performance is improved by the frequent intake of small amounts of water.
- When we are thirsty (the first conscious sign of dehydration) mental performance deteriorates by 10 percent.
- Pupils concentrate better because they are not distracted by feelings of dehydration – thirst, tiredness and irritability.
- Pupils achieve more when their health and learning needs are met.

## Dehydration

If children do not drink enough water they can quickly become dehydrated.

Simple day-to-day dehydration can cause a variety of symptoms including:

- Thirst.
- Headaches and stomach aches.
- Fatigue.
- Irritability.
- Impaired concentration.
- Impaired mental performance.
- Impaired physical and sports performance.

Some children may be reluctant to drink water because they do not like to use the school toilets. It is important therefore to make sure the toilets are clean and well maintained.

Dehydration is also associated with the following health problems:

- Constipation.
- Urinary tract infections.
- Bedwetting, daytime wetting and soiling problems.
- Kidney problems.
- Acute appendicitis.
- Cardiovascular disease.
- Some cancers.

## Options for providing free accessible drinking water

### Water bottles on desk

- Easy, cheap and the most effective way for children to get their water. Either schools supply a water bottle or it is brought in from home.
- Studies have shown that significantly more is drunk by those who have fluids within arm's length than by those who have to get up to go and fetch it.
- During exams bottles could be kept under chairs.
- Water bottles should not be allowed in science labs and ICT suites.

- Ideally sources of cool and palatable drinking water should also be available in school for children to refill their bottles as necessary.
- Bottles can be taken to PE sessions.
- Non-spill sports caps are ideal.
- Bottles should be named to avoid confusion with a permanent marker or washable label.

#### *Practical aspects of using water bottles*

- Involve the pupils in developing a code of behaviour for the use of water machines and bottles on desks.
- For younger pupils, a crate could be used for storage of bottles in a central place in the classroom, and allow pupils frequent access to them. Pupils will then need to be reminded to drink the water, so regular drink breaks may be required.
- Having staff drink water in class can be a good example to pupils.

#### **Water Coolers**

- Water coolers use either mains or bottled water.
- Mains coolers (piped with a mains water supply) are the best.
- They may be used with disposable cups or cones or used to refill bottles.
- They should be sited in open places in view.
- They provide a constant source of cool, pleasant tasting water, which is quickly and easily accessed and encourage reluctant water drinkers.
- They're easily installed and cheaper than you might think.

#### **Water fountains**

- Schools must contact Property and Architectural Services if they wish to install a water fountain.
- Schools are required to fill in a Maintenance Request Order if they have any problems with their water fountain.

#### **Jugs and Cups**

- A basic alternative. The class stops for organised fluid breaks (perhaps best suited to younger children) ideally before or after break and in the afternoon, or children help themselves as and when they want.
- Children can take it in turns to be responsible for washing up the cups.
- Works best when drinking water is easily accessible in order to provide freshly drawn water. However, if you have access to a fridge normal tap water tastes much better if it is left to stand in the fridge (some of the chlorine evaporates and it is cool).
- Taps must be main-water supplied and labelled as drinking water.
- Children should have their own cup which are washed on a daily basis.
- Drinking taps should not be located in toilets.
- Water filters can be fitted under the sink to improve taste and temperature.

#### **Vending Machines**

- Schools with vending machines or tuck shops might wish to consider selling bottled water and milk as a healthy alternative (Note that some flavoured and/or carbonated waters may contain sugar).
- Schools with good access to fresh drinking water may even wish to consider removing vending machines.
- Vending machines should not be considered an alternative to free water facilities.

#### **How Parents Can help**

- Send your child to school each day with healthy drinks to consume at break, lunch times and for the way home.
- Add a few ice cubes or crushed ice to their water bottles or drinks.
- Fill up water bottles and drinks the evening before and cool them in the fridge overnight.
- Look for plastic bottles that you can fill and freeze safely overnight for use on very hot days.
- You can buy cooler jackets that you put in the freezer overnight and place over bottles.
- Good drinking habits begin at home. Role model healthy drinking yourself.
- Involve the whole family in drinking more water.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids, ideally water and milk, before and after school.
- Offer drinks at regular intervals and don't rely on the child's feelings of thirst.
- Take water on car journeys: sports bottles for each person are ideal.
- Encourage your child to drink before, during and after exercise.
- Provide your child with a water bottle for after-school, week-end and holiday activities.
- Put a jug of water with ice on the table with meals.
- Fruit and vegetables contain lots of water and valuable nutrients so include them in your child's lunch box and for snacks at schools and at home.
- In Winter it can be more difficult to keep up an adequate intake of fluids if only cold drinks are made available; offer your child hot drinks and soup as well as plenty of water, milk and pure fruit juices.

# Drinking Water in Schools Guidance

## Common Concerns

- **There will be an increase in numbers of children using the toilet**

There maybe an initial increase in some children which usually settles within about 2-3 weeks as the bladder adjusts.

- **There will be disruption and bad behaviour**

If there is early disruption and over-excited behaviour, it normally settles within a few days as the novelty wears off. Bottles can be removed from unruly pupils if necessary.

- **Bottles can get mixed up and this could be unhygienic**

Bottles can be labelled with a permanent marker to avoid confusion.

- **Books and work will be spoiled due to spillages**

It is important to use only purpose-made non-spill bottles. Schools that have used them have reported no problems. Also children quickly become accustomed to taking care. For younger children, bottles can be kept in crates at the side of the classroom.

- **Children will fiddle with bottles during lessons**

Some children might fiddle with their bottles during lessons but they might be kinaesthetic learners who could actually benefit from fiddling as they learn. Establishing a code of behaviour for use of the bottles will help manage unacceptable silliness

## Care of water bottles

### In school

- The water bottles should only be used for water.
- Rinse the bottle and the cap daily with clean water.
- Once a week the bottle and the cap should be soaked in a solution of Milton as per label instructions.
- Rinse both the bottle and the cap again and leave the bottle sealed.
- Rinse the bottle and the cap again before filling for use.

### At home

- If bottles are sent home to be cleaned, they should be washed in warm soapy water, the sports cap scrubbed with a brush, and the bottles left to air-dry upside down in a hygienic place; or they can be washed in a dishwasher if the bottles are suitable.

Recent research has suggested that continued use of disposable water bottles might cause bacterial contamination. If such bottles are used it is safer to use them for a limited time only.

## Websites

<http://www.eric.org.uk>

<http://www.coolschools.org.uk>

<http://www.wateriscoolinschool.org.uk>

<http://www.mhsa.org.uk>

## Resources cited within guidance

Think Water – Guidance on Water in Schools, Welsh Assembly Government (2004)

Waters In School <http://www.enuresis.org.uk>

Manchester Healthy School Award, Water in Schools <http://www.mhsa.org.uk>

## For further information contact:

**Louise Thomas**  
**Health Promoting Schools Development Manager**  
**NHS Highland and Highland Council**

Tel: 01463 704959. Email: [Louise.Thomas@hnb.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:Louise.Thomas@hnb.scot.nhs.uk)

**David Rex**  
**Child Health Lead Dietician**

Tel: 01463 701314. Email: [david.rex@hpct.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:david.rex@hpct.scot.nhs.uk)