

Think Water

Guidance on Water in Schools



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Audience:

Headteachers, teachers and governors of schools receiving Assembly-funded water coolers.

Overview:

This document provides information and advice regarding the health benefits of drinking water, the care of the water cooler and water bottles used in school, approaches to setting up a water-bottles-on-desks scheme and information which may be photocopied for parents.

Action required:

To take due note of the advice provided in the document.

Inquiries:

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Additional copies:

Can be obtained from the Assembly's websites www.learning.wales.gov.uk
or www.healthschool.org.uk

Health Promotion Division/Pupil Support Division
Welsh Assembly Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

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Think Water

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Foreword

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to improving the health of the people of Wales. The introduction of water coolers in schools, in partnership with Welsh Water, is an initiative to encourage an increase in water consumption by pupils in Welsh schools and thereby improve health in the long and short term.

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

The provision of water in schools, and especially having water on desks, links well with learning programmes such as thinking skills and accelerated learning. It also contributes to the schools' development as health promoting schools, as part of the local healthy schools scheme.

We encourage schools to embrace this initiative for the benefit of the health and learning of the children of Wales.



Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning
Jane Hutt AM, Minister for Health and Social Services
Mike Brooker, Managing Director, Welsh Water



The benefits of drinking water

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 and health

- Drinking water throughout the day is an important way of protecting health and contributing to well-being.
- Drinking plenty of water can help to prevent a range of short and long-term health problems such as headaches, bladder and bowel problems, and cancer.
- Water is a healthy drink and does not damage teeth, unlike still and fizzy soft-drinks high in sugar, additives, artificial sweeteners and caffeine.

Water and learning

- When we are thirsty our mental performance declines by 10 per cent.
- Mental performance improves with frequent intakes of small amounts of water.
- Pupils' concentration improves when they are not distracted by feelings of thirst, tiredness and irritability.

Children will achieve more when their health and learning needs are met. It is important therefore to ensure that they have easy access to water throughout the day and to provide a school environment that supports health and well-being through a health promoting school approach.

Your water cooler

Your water cooler needs to be accessible to children, but also positioned so that supervision is adequate. Contractors will help you identify a suitable position based on the following guidance:

Positioning of machines:



- Not in or close to a toilet area
- Must be easily accessible to all pupils
- To be placed in open areas in frequent view of school staff
- Must not restrict access or encroach on an escape route
- Must comply with Health and Safety and Fire Regulations (Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997)
- Machines to be securely fixed to appropriate structure
- Site inspection to be carried out with site manager responsible for risk assessment (generally the headteacher)

Water machine maintenance



- It is essential for health and hygiene that the machine is regularly maintained and sanitised. The machine supplier will carry out this maintenance procedure three times per year, on site, for the first year, and then as contracted.
- It is the responsibility of the site manager responsible for risk assessment (usually the headteacher) to ensure this is carried out within the correct timescales.
- Environmental Health Officers may also carry out random checks to ensure water quality and report any problems, based on previous microbiological results and maintenance histories.

Water cooler care

It is very important to keep your water cooler clean.

Please follow these guidelines:

- If the machine is fitted with a drip tray, then please empty the drip tray at least daily.
- The drip tray should be damp-wiped weekly using a non-abrasive cleaning agent; or it can be washed in a dishwasher.
- Please ensure the external surfaces of the cooler are kept clean. The taps and machine panels should be wiped down weekly with a food-standard antibacterial surface cleaner (do not use any bleach or unsuitable cleaning liquids).
- In the interest of hygiene, anyone using the water cooler must ensure drinking receptacles, such as cups and bottles, are clean.
- It is advisable that the cooler is flushed through at the beginning of each school week; and definitely after any period of holiday closure.
- To flush the machine clean, draw approximately 3 litres of water from the tap(s) into a clean bucket. Ensure that the bucket is never in contact with the dispensing area.

Try to be water-efficient and use this water in your garden area/water-butt if you have one; or use it to water plants around the school.

- Machines should be checked monthly for the build-up of lint or dust in the ventilation grilles on the cabinet. There should be no obstruction within 20cm of these grilles. Grilles will be cleaned as part of normal maintenance, but please contact your maintenance engineer if the ventilation grilles become congested with dust or lint which is not easily removed from the outside of the cooler.
- Please treat the machine as you would any other piece of electrical equipment, and leave on or turn off for any holiday period in line with your normal practice.

A service telephone number should be fitted to the cooler.
A paper copy of the service jobsheets will be left at the school for your records.

Please copy and laminate these guidelines and keep them in a visible place next to the water cooler machine

Water bottles

Pupils will need to use water bottles to drink from. Guidance on keeping them clean is provided below.

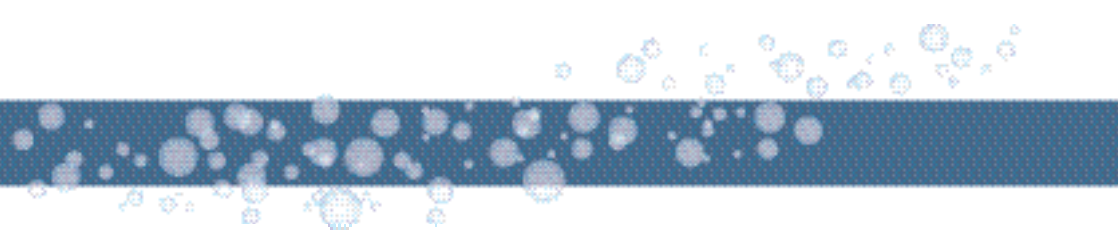
These bottles should be used only for water.

It is preferable for children and parents to take responsibility for cleaning the bottles daily at home. Wash the bottles daily in warm soapy water, scrub the sports caps with a brush, rinse, and leave the bottles to air-dry upside down in a hygienic place; or wash them in a dishwasher if the bottles are suitable.

If the school prefers to take responsibility, then the above advice can be followed in school. Ensure that hands are well washed before handling the bottles, and that each child's bottle and cap are washed separately and returned to them.

If schools take responsibility for the cleanliness of bottles, then it would be advisable to discuss appropriate procedures with the local Environmental Health Department, and to record agreed procedures within the school's Health and Safety policy. A current example of such advice, given to Pembrokeshire schools, is reproduced opposite.

Recent research has suggested that continued use of disposable water bottles might cause bacterial contamination, although contamination could be the result of not washing them properly. If such bottles are used it could be safer to use them for a limited time only.



It is recommended that purpose-made sports-style bottles are used, which are of strong construction. These can be purchased from a number of manufacturers and can be bought in bulk for schools at a reduced cost.

The following advice has been agreed with Pembrokeshire schools.

Simple steps for keeping water bottles clean:

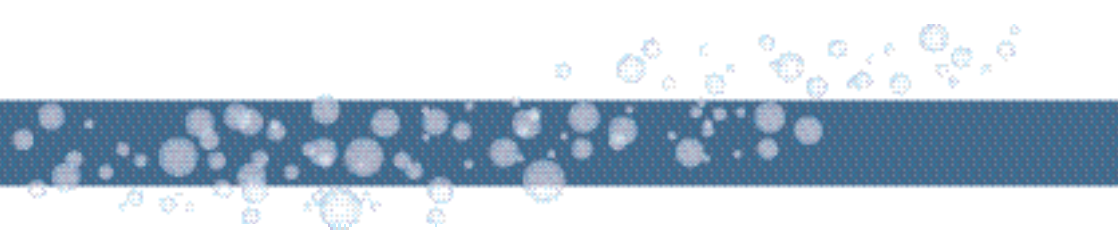
- These bottles should only be used for water.
- Rinse the bottle and the cap daily with fresh cold water.
- Once a week, the bottle and the cap should be soaked in a solution of Milton as per label instructions.
- Rinse both the bottle and the cap again and leave the bottle sealed.
- Rinse the bottle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

Water bottles on desks

Due to the benefits of taking frequent small drinks of water, schools are advised to adopt a water-on-desks policy.

Step by step advice for setting up a water-bottles-on-desks scheme

- Discuss the health and educational benefits of the scheme with staff, parents, governors and school nurse.
- Discuss the benefits of the scheme with the pupils. Involve the pupils in advertising the scheme by the use of posters and newsletters/leaflets.
- Pilot schemes (for a single year group) are recommended to initially introduce water-bottles-on-desks schemes. This will allow you to try out the scheme without pressure, iron out any glitches, make the pilot group feel special (which will encourage them to behave responsibly) and to make other years keen to be involved and equally responsible!
- Ideally, pupils should keep water bottles on their desks. During exams bottles could be kept under chairs.
- Water bottles should be banned from science labs and ICT suites.
- Purpose made non-spill bottles can be purchased and used as a fundraiser by selling them to parents at a small profit.
- Use clear, non-spill, sports-style bottles and allow only water to be drunk during class time; this is important for the care of teeth and also for overall health and learning. Occasional random checks could be made.
- Involve pupils in developing a code of behaviour for the use of water machines and bottles on desks.
- To prevent bottles being mixed up, ensure that each bottle is clearly marked with the child's name using a permanent marker pen. Keep re-marking the bottle to keep the name clearly visible.

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- For younger pupils, you may wish to use a crate 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.
 - On sports days and at special events, take the crates of bottles outside to encourage children to drink during activities.
 - Encourage children to drink extra water following exercise.
 - Launch the scheme by holding a special assembly; pupils could give a presentation on the importance of drinking water. You might wish to invite a sports personality, the school nurse or another health professional to raise the profile and add interest to the launch. Invite parents and governors to the launch.
 - Create a school policy involving staff, pupils, parents and governors and include it in school brochure/prospectus.
 - Liaise with your local Healthy School Co-ordinator for advice and support.
 - Water bottles must be washed and refilled daily.
 - Advice on cleaning water bottles is included in this guidance for distribution to parents. Alternatively, the school might wish to take responsibility for keeping the bottle clean, in which case you should establish clear procedures on how to carry this out.
 - Having teachers and support staff drink water in class can be a good example to pupils.
 - Water is additional to other drinks at breaks (such as milk).
 - Some teachers might not be convinced about the benefits of having water available in class. Perhaps those who are convinced could run a pilot programme – and when it succeeds other teachers will also see the benefit, and join in.



Common concerns

Some schools are concerned that introducing water on desks will have a disruptive effect. Some common concerns are discussed below.

Children will misbehave.

Pilot schools have reported few problems other than initial silliness by a minority, but this soon settles down.

Children will need to use the toilet more frequently.

The bladder adjusts to an increased intake of water within a few weeks, therefore more frequent visits to the toilet happen only in the initial period.

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 report 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 with their bottles as they learn.

Bottles will become mixed up and cause a hygiene problem.

Each child's bottle should be clearly marked with the child's name using a permanent marker and re-marked regularly to avoid confusion.

Information for parents

Few school children drink enough water. School children need to drink at least 6-8 glasses of fluids (1.5-2 litres), ideally water, but also some milk, taken regularly throughout the day (at least 3-4 glasses while at school). Plenty of additional fluid should be drunk in warm weather and/or when exercising. Low fluid intake can lead to health problems and can also affect concentration, learning and behaviour.

The links between drinking more water and health

- Drinking water regularly throughout the day is an important way of protecting health and contributing to well-being.
- Having an adequate intake of water can help to prevent a range of short- and long-term health problems.
- Water is a healthier drink than still and fizzy soft-drinks which can be high in sugar, artificial sweeteners, additives and caffeine.

The links between drinking 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 per cent.
- Pupils concentrate better because they are not distracted by feelings of dehydration – thirst, tiredness and irritability.
- Children achieve more when their health and learning needs are met.



Dehydration

If children do not drink enough water at school they can quickly become dehydrated. Children's fluid requirements are proportionally higher than adults,

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.

Dehydration is also associated with the following health problems:

- constipation
- urinary tract infections
- bedwetting, daytime wetting and soiling problems
- kidney problems, including kidney stones and disease
- acute appendicitis
- cardiovascular disease
- some cancers.

How do you know if you are dehydrated?

Children (and adults) can be taught to recognise when their fluid intake is too low as the urine becomes concentrated (small amounts of dark yellow, cloudy, smelly urine). Drinking more water will encourage a healthy, odourless and plentiful flow of urine, no darker than the colour of pale straw. It will encourage children to go to the toilet regularly throughout the day.

Wetting or enuresis

There is a link between low fluid intake during the day and wetting incidents. If children do not drink adequately during the day, their urine becomes concentrated, which can irritate the bladder and may cause daytime wetting. An insufficient fluid intake during the day can also reduce their bladder capacity. If they then drink large quantities when they go home their bladder might not be able to cope and bedwetting could result. This affects one in 11 nine-year-olds in the UK. When children drink more water and their bladder capacity has improved they will need to go to the toilet less frequently but will produce larger quantities of urine.

Why choose water?

It is very important to drink only water during class. Keep any squash, fruit juice or fizzy drinks to mealtimes only (and ideally limit fizzy drinks to occasional drinks). Sweet and acidic drinks (including those that are sugar-free) are harmful to teeth. The more frequently they are drunk, the greater the harm to teeth. The consumption of high-sugar soft drinks can cause a rapid rise in blood sugar levels, followed by a dip, resulting in low levels of physical and mental energy. Some children could be sensitive to the additives, caffeine and sweeteners in soft drinks.

Care of bottles

If bottles are sent home to be cleaned, they should be washed in warm soapy water, the sports caps 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.

Parents' information, which can be freely copied, and much of the information regarding Benefits of Water and Water Bottle on Desks reproduced from the national Water is Cool in School Campaign by kind permission of The Enuresis Resource and Information Centre (ERIC) 34 Old School House, Britannia Road, Kingswood, Bristol BS15 8DB. Tel 0117 960 3060.

charity website www.eric.org.uk

campaign website www.wateriscoolinschool.org.uk.

ERIC is the medical charity (reg. charity number 1002424) that provides advice and support on childhood wetting and soiling problems.



Quotes from a pilot scheme in Pembrokeshire

At first, because the children were young, we thought it would be difficult but it has been the simplest and most successful initiative we have implemented.

Bottles are filled twice a day and placed in crates in the classrooms; all children have access to the water at all times and are ready to work at all times.

The scheme gives independence especially to the little ones. We have had no problems and it really has not been an issue.

Sally Francis, Head Teacher, Mount Airey Infants School, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire.

We are really supportive of the scheme and all staff feel it makes a difference to the children's concentration especially in the afternoons and summer months. The children do not abuse the system and we have had no problems.

Clare Perry, Deputy Head Teacher, Golden Grove Community School, Pembroke, Pembrokeshire.

An excellent scheme. It encourages us all, pupils and staff alike, to drink water. The water is freely accessible all day and also well used by after-school sports clubs. The water is cool and refreshing and has proved to be of enormous benefit to our school, an altogether marvellous idea.

The staff of Johnston CP School, Johnston, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire.

- *Water is nice and cool; it keeps us healthy.*
- *It refreshes.*
- *It quenches our thirst and keeps us alive.*
- *We have super clean water available all the time.*
- *We can fill our sports bottles whenever we are thirsty.*
- *We are allowed to drink sips of water during lessons.*
- *We can drink it anytime.*
- *Good on a hot day.*
- *It helps after exercise and if you have a headache.*
- *We are so lucky to have a water cooler because we are getting healthier and healthier.*

Pupils of year 4 & 5 of Johnston CP School, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire.

- *I can't concentrate when I'm hot but water helps me get it back.*
- *It keeps me going.*
- *I get hot and you need water to cool down.*
- *Everybody gets thirsty, don't they?*

Key stage 1 pupils of Golden Grove Community School, Pembroke, Pembrokeshire

