

Fieldwork

including any science work outside the laboratory
see also CLEAPSS Student Safety Sheets 73 and 74

Substance	Hazard	Comment
Site-specific hazards	 DANGER  BIOHAZARD	<p>Schools will normally have identified any significant hazards in school grounds, as will other sites which regularly welcome schools for fieldwork. Be aware that broken glass and animal faeces are always possible.</p> <p>Working outdoors, eg at the seaside, in the countryside or near water, will introduce hazards specific to the location, eg drowning, trapping by tides, falls from a height, slips and trips, plants with poisonous parts, pesticides, animal bites/stings and animal-borne infections, eg toxocariasis from soil contaminated with cat or dog faeces, Weil's disease from water contaminated with rat urine, and Lyme disease from ticks.</p> <p>Working outdoors can lead to exposure to weather conditions which present hazards, eg strong sunlight (near ultraviolet, see CLEAPSS Student Safety Sheet 12), freezing cold, rain.</p>
Transport hazards	 DANGER	Walking to the site may result in exposure to traffic hazards. Public transport, hired coaches, the school minibus or private cars introduce a variety of different hazards.
Child abuse and / or disappearance	 DANGER	Children in unfamiliar settings may wander off. If children are in contact with members of the public, there is a small possibility of child abuse.

Typical control measures to reduce risk

- As far as possible only visits sites you know to be safe and follow the Code of Practice for that type of fieldwork.
- Ensure that others know where you are and make sure you use safe equipment and transport arrangements.
- When working in shoreline ecologies, check tide tables and beware of the risk of slipping on seaweed.
- Ensure shoes and clothing are suitable for the terrain and for varying weather conditions. For example, avoid bare legs and arms in areas known to be infested with ticks, or in sunny conditions wear sun hats and use sun cream.
- Wear gloves when handling plants likely to cause irritation or seeds treated with pesticides.
- Wear hard hats when working in quarries and eye protection when hammering rocks.
- Avoid contact with water with growths of blue-green algae on the surface.
- Cover cuts and abrasions with water-proof dressings when working in and around water which may be contaminated by rat urine.
- Treat unknown plants with caution; never taste or eat a plant unless it is definitely known to be non-poisonous.
- Approach vertebrates with caution, especially those with young.
- Ensure easy access to hand-washing facilities before eating/drinking; if soap/water is unavailable use alcohol gel.
- Beware of the possibility of hay fever etc. Carry a first-aid kit and ensure at least one person is trained to use it.
- Ensure there is a workable emergency contact system. Be aware that there may be no mobile phone signal in some areas.

Assessing the risks

- What are the details of the activity to be undertaken? What are the hazards?
- What is the chance of something going wrong?
- How serious would it be if something did go wrong?
- How can the risk(s) be controlled for this activity?
eg can it be done safely? Does the procedure need to be altered?

Emergency action

In all emergency situations, alert the responsible adult immediately. Be aware that actions may include the following:

- Insect bites & stings If sting is visible and can be displaced easily, brush off sideways with the edge of a credit card or finger nail, avoiding further damage. Raise affected body part and, if possible, apply cold compress for 10+ minutes.
- Tick bites Remove the tick with forceps by grasping as close to the skin as possible and pulling gently without twisting or jerking. Keep the tick for identification and consult a medic.
- Animal bites Wash the wound with warm soapy water or, if unavailable, alcohol-free cleansing wipes. Raise and support the wound, cover with a sterile dressing. Consult a medic.
- Minor cuts Wash the wound or, if water is unavailable, use cleansing wipes. Get the casualty to apply a small, sterile dressing.