

Guidance Note: Risk Assessment for Finger Trapping in Schools

Introduction

This guidance note has been produced in response to a number of incidents and provides advice on the risk assessment process and some potential control measures to consider.

It is considered a foreseeable risk that people, particularly young children, may trap their fingers in the hinge-side of doors. This can result in very painful and significant injuries such as crushed or broken fingers and even amputation in some extreme cases.

Head teachers must first ensure a risk assessment is undertaken to decide on the necessary control measures. Such controls can include the installation of hinge-guards or similar solutions but there are also other alterations and procedural changes available. Whatever control is adopted must be subject to ongoing monitoring to check its continued effectiveness.

Please note: Due to the presence of very young children, finger-guards are always considered essential for all doors/gates within Early Years and KS1 settings.

Risk Assessment Process

Who is at risk?

The first part of the process is to assess who might be at particular risk with regard to trapping for the other areas of the school. Whilst not eliminated, the risk of finger trapping may be considered lesser for older pupils who tend to have developed a better sense of the danger over time and are less likely to place fingers in the area of danger. As such, observation of pupils and other building occupants (i.e. visitors, particularly where you have/intend to have lettings) during the general use of the premises is a vital part of the assessment process to gain a greater understanding of doors which may be considered more hazardous.

The assessment should also address those with any disabilities, special educational needs, or behaviour issues that could contribute to an increase in the risk of injury. It is prudent to consult staff and see if they have noticed issues with pupils putting their fingers near the danger areas before.

Staff should be made aware of the risk, as they are likely be an integral part of any procedural controls required. Any previously recorded incidents of finger trapping, or near misses should also be reviewed to identify any potential trends; this may well identify 'hotspots' that may need physical guarding.

Doors & Gates

A systematic inspection of all internal and external doors and gates should be undertaken, looking at both the characteristics of the doors and gates (e.g. fire door, heavy, fast closing, automated) and their location in relation to the use of the premises.

Fire doors may already suit being held open during normal operation with an approved hold-open device such as a maglock or dorgard unit, however such devices should only be fitted subject to a fire risk assessment by a competent person. This also won't wholly eliminate the risk of trapping, and there is a need to look at any out-of-hours use of the premises which should be addressed in the policy and procedure for lettings.

Heavy and fast closing doors naturally increase the risk; fitting or adjusting existing closers can help control this but again will not eliminate the risk. As well as the doors themselves, it is vital to pay attention to their setting and the activities taking place around them.

Particular attention during inspection should be paid to the following:

- Circulation routes and doors next to areas where pupils congregate/queue (e.g. dining halls, toilets etc.);
- Doors near entrances;
- Doors in unsupervised areas i.e. in toilets, and other areas children might play with doors;
- Doors that are susceptible to slamming from strong gusts of wind;
- Heavy doors (with or without dampening mechanisms);
- Pedestrian gates and other external gates;
- Areas used by after-school clubs or lettings, particularly where younger children are involved;
- Any areas where essential equipment (e.g. a paper towel dispenser) has been positioned adjacent to doors and thus increases potential risk;
- Doors which have a two stage closing mechanism in which they initially close very fast but slow at the end of their trajectory;
- Doors where condition of door, frame, hinges etc. is poor.

Control measures

For some of aforementioned areas, there may be procedural controls available in the first instance. Keeping children orderly i.e. in a supervised line and not allowing them to 'bunch up' around doors, is an established method of control however this will require significant supervision. It might be that extra levels of supervision will be required at busy times, like lunch, to achieve this.

Where closers are in place that can cause doors to close too fast, then these might need to be adjusted, or replaced where this is otherwise not possible to avoid.

Schools may also consider giving regular talks to pupils on the dangers of playing around doors and placing their fingers in areas at the edges of doors where they could receive an injury. This is not a sufficient control on its own but can supplement other control measures.

Staff should also be briefed to remain aware of trapping hazards and the need to report all accidents, near-miss incidents and defects in doors/gates, which can serve to highlight a problem before an injury is sustained.

Doors and gates in a poor state of repair should be repaired or replaced where it is not cost-effective for repairs.

Where possible, essential equipment (towel dispensers, hand driers etc.) should be moved away from areas immediately behind or adjacent to doors.

Finger-guards are relatively cheap and should be retrospectively fitted to any doors or gates where significant risk is identified and cannot sufficiently be controlled through other means. Consider the installation of finger guards in other areas during replacement or refurbishment projects to design out residual risk.

Note: Advice must be sought from a fire door specialist or competent fire risk assessor before fitting any finger-guard devices to fire doors in order to ensure that neither the fire resisting or self-closing properties are not adversely affected by alterations.

Types of guarding

A variety of guarding solutions are available on the market with varying levels of cost. These range from plastic or metal covers to rollers, some thought should be given to the durability and longevity of the chosen product against the cost of ongoing repair; it may be cheaper initially but more prone to failure in future.

Some examples of different guards are shown below:



Monitoring and further action

When controls are decided upon, these will need to be monitored as part of the school's regular inspection process. A review of the assessment will be required where the usage of an area changes; an accident or near miss occurs; after a year has passed; or there is any other reason why the assessment is no longer considered valid.

Where procedural controls are found to be ineffective, i.e. near misses or accidents occur; ultimately, the only option becomes to place finger-guards on doors. Any such guarding should also be subject to regular monitoring for both effectiveness and maintenance. Special attention should also be paid where finger-guard devices are installed on fire doors to ensure the closing action is not hindered in any way and there are no signs that the door's integrity has been damaged by the device.