PROTECTION FROM THE SUN

Guidelines to assist in implementing the Student Welfare Policy

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Student Welfare Directorate

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Acknowledgments:
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Photographs: David Lefcovitch, School Education News
Kate Cunningham & Robert Pearce, NSW Cancer Council.
Graphic Design: BIAGDESIGN (02) 9808 1120

ISBN 0 7310 8349 0
SCIS 89832
Introduction

The increasing occurrence of skin cancer in Australia is a matter of concern for the whole community, including schools. Australia has the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world, with an estimated 160,000 new cases and 1,200 deaths recorded each year.

There are five major factors in Australia which contribute to these statistics:

- a large proportion of the population has fair skin
- ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun is of high intensity
- people’s lifestyle, work, school and recreational practices may expose them to the sun frequently and for long periods
- a suntan has often been viewed as healthy and attractive
- exposure of the skin to the sun is common during peak UVR times.

Skin cancer and related skin damage are the result of frequent and unprotected exposure to the sun.

Much of the sun exposure that causes later skin damage occurs during childhood and adolescence. By the age of fifteen years many children have developed irreversible skin damage due to exposure to the sun. Sunburn and even a mild redness to the skin are indicators of damaging exposure to the sun.

Most skin cancers and related skin damage can be prevented by protecting the skin from the sun and avoiding exposure when UVR is at its highest between 10 am and 2 pm Eastern Standard Time (11 am to 3 pm during daylight saving).

Schools have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for students and staff and this responsibility includes the provision of adequate protection from the sun throughout the year. Effective school action on sun protection will ensure that government schools make a significant contribution to community efforts to reduce skin cancer and related skin damage.

**Good practice:**

**HATS**

A primary school put every student’s name and every teacher’s name in a hat. Once a week, a name (teacher or student) was called out over the school loudspeaker. If the person named was wearing a hat they received a prize.

**Good practice:**

**SCHEDULING**

Arrange staggered lunchbreaks or shorter lunchbreaks. Timetable outdoor lessons and sport to avoid peak UVR times.
Reviewing sun protection

In reviewing sun protection each school community will need to consider the following issues:

- existing policies and resources
- existing shade provisions such as covered outdoor learning areas, pergolas, shadecloth, covered picnic tables, shelters and trees
- the extent to which teaching and learning activities relating to sun protection are provided in the curriculum
- the level of existing awareness and support from different groups within the school community
- the current level of sun protection practices adopted by staff
- the adequacy of the current school uniform for sun protection
- extent to which outdoor activities and events are currently scheduled during peak UVR times
- the existence of shade facilities at sporting venues.

**Good practice:**

**UNIFORMS**
The weave of the fabric and the style of clothing (with collars, sleeves and preferably loose fitting) are the most important factors in deciding on school uniforms which provide the best protection from the sun.

**Good practice:**

**CURRICULUM**
Year 6 students conducted experiments in Personal Development, Health and Physical Education using a sun reactive monitor (an UV sensometer card). They monitored the level of UVR at different times of the day, in different weather conditions and in various parts of the school playground.
Planning for sun protection

A comprehensive school sun protection plan will ensure:

- effective teaching and learning about the need for sun protection at all times - not just during school hours
- strategies are in place to increase the understanding of staff and other school community members about issues relating to effective strategies for skin protection
- opportunities for collaborative action with students, parents and other community members on sun protection initiatives
- promotion of sun protection as a health and safety issue (rather than as a matter of discipline)
- positive role modelling by staff and all members of the school community
- protection from UVR for all outdoor activities (including physical education, carnivals, excursions and sport)
- the wearing of sun glasses is encouraged in those situations where glare and reflected radiance are high (including reflection from water, sand and snow).

Good practice:

TIMETABLE
The SRC at a boys high school made a recommendation for consideration by the school executive that the morning break be extended to 45 minutes and that “lunch time” be a 15 minute break, reducing the potential for exposure to the sun during peak UVR times and providing a longer food break early in the day.

Some questions to ask about sun protection:
When did we last review our sun protection policy?
When did we last review our sun protection strategies?
How extensive a review do we need to conduct now?
Who needs to be involved in a review?
Students will be encouraged to protect their skin by:

- reducing their exposure to the sun, wherever possible
- wearing broad-brimmed hats which provide adequate protection to the face, neck and ears
- wearing clothing (preferably in closely woven fabrics) with collars and longer sleeves which provide effective protection from the sun
- remaining in the shade whenever possible, particularly during peak UVR times
- participating in sun protection activities
- using 15 + broad spectrum sunscreens as an adjunct to other sun protection measures. Sunscreens should be applied before going outside and reapplied frequently as directed by the manufacturer.

As a result of the school’s planning for sun protection:

- students will understand why sun protection is important and will take effective action to protect themselves
- parents, staff and other school community members will understand the risks of sun exposure and will support each other in developing and implementing the school’s sun protection plan throughout the year.

**Good practice:**

**ROLE MODELLING**

The school staff at a city primary school decide to model appropriate behaviour while on playground duty, excursions and other outdoor activities. A hat rack is provided in the staff common room and bulk pump packs of sunscreens are purchased for staff use. As a result, while outside, all staff apply sunscreens and wear hats.
Where can further support and advice be obtained?

Schools could use the process described in I (part of the Student Welfare, Good Discipline and Effective Learning package) as a framework for reviewing their sun protection policies and procedures. Additional copies are available from I, facsimile (02) 9647 1633 or PO Box 6423 Silverwater NSW 2128.

Brochure, Sun Shade in Schools, available from Properties Directorate, NSW Department of School Education, telephone (02) 9372 8518.

Schools Project Officer, NSW Cancer Council, telephone (02) 9334 1900 or facsimile (02) 9357 2676.

Local and regional offices of State Forests for information on the most suitable shade trees for the school’s locality.

School Sport Unit, telephone (02) 9707 6900.

Good practice:
SUNSCREENS
A primary school has a sunscreen pack in every classroom, funded by the P & C. It is used by both students and teachers before they go outside at recess and lunch.