SunSmartSchools
Policy Guidelines

This document contains links to online resource materials for further information. If viewing a printed copy, please contact Cancer Council WA's SunSmart Education Coordinator on 9388 4351 or sunsmart@cancerwa.asn.au to obtain copies of the resources referred to by email or mail.

Why have a school sun protection policy?

Rationale

Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world with two out of three Australians developing some form of skin cancer during their lifetime. Overexposure to the sun during childhood and adolescent is an important contributing factor to the development of skin cancer later in life. As students are at school during times of peak ultraviolet (UV) radiation, schools can play a major role in creating a supportive environment that minimises exposure and encourages sun protective behaviours.

SunSmart Schools is a nationally recognised program for schools that have a strong commitment to sun protection. Join over 4600 schools throughout Australia and become a recognised SunSmart School! Further information about the program appears later in this document.

Skin cancer is one cancer which can be easily avoided.

UV radiation is part of the sun's light which burns and damages the skin. Children and adults can be sunburned in less than 10 minutes in some regions.

In Western Australia sun protection is required all year round in areas north of Perth. For Perth and areas south of Perth, sun protection is required all year round with the exception of June and July when the average UV Index is below 3.

Schools have the potential to have a major impact on the level of sun exposure that students may sustain for the following reasons:

- Children are at school throughout the high risk period each day for five days a week.
- The crucial period for sustaining damaging levels of sun exposure occurs during the school years.
- Schools can play a significant role in changing behaviours through education.
- The Sun Protection Policy can be written as a separate policy or incorporated into other policy areas, such as student health care.

Schools have a major responsibility to initiate and implement skin cancer prevention strategies in the interests of students' health and long-term healthy environments.

Steps in developing a sun protection policy

The process of developing a sun protection policy is as important as the policy itself. All sectors of the school community need to be consulted and given an opportunity to comment on the draft. The policy is more likely to be adhered to if all those affected have been involved in its development and agree and understand its intent.

These steps can be used as a guide:

Step 1 – Form a committee

The committee may include any of the following members; principal, teachers, students, parents,

school nurse or Health/Physical Education coordinator.

Its role is to make recommendations about the policy content, to develop a draft, circulate the draft for feedback and to prepare the final version of the document. They do this on behalf of the school community. Once a sun protection policy is in place, an existing committee, such as Health or Student Welfare, could monitor its long-term implementation.

Step 2 – Conduct information sessions

The whole school community (parents, staff and students) needs to be aware of the dangers of overexposure to the sun, especially during childhood and adolescence. Awareness-raising sessions for parents and staff will assist in gaining support for the implementation of a sun protection policy. Education through the curriculum will raise student's awareness.

Step 3 – Identify sun protection measures that area already being undertaken

The following checklist can be used as a discussion document for improving sun protection at your school.

Sun Protection Strategy	✓	✗	How can we improve in this area?
100% of students wear either legionnaire or broad-brimmed hats.			
No hat, play in the shade rule is implemented.			
Teachers wear either legionnaire or broad-brimmed hats.			
Parents are actively encouraged to wear hats when visiting the school.			
Students are actively encouraged to use shaded areas.			
All students eat lunch in full shade.			
Sun protection and skin cancer awareness is incorporated in the curriculum at all year levels.			
A plan is in place to increase/maintain the amount of shade at the school.			
Where possible, outdoor activities are conducted outside peak UV times or held under cover.			
SPF 30+ sunscreen is available for staff and students whenever they go outside.			
Students are encouraged to come to school wearing sunscreen.			
The design of the school uniform provides good protection from the sun, eg, shirts with collars, longer sleeves.			
Students attending outdoor swimming classes are required to wear T-shirts, rash-vests or swimwear which fully covers their trunk.			
There are regular sun protection reminders.			
Sun protection is incorporated into the planning of all outdoor events.			

Step 4 – Write, review and finalise the policy

The policy should contain defined goals, clear statements on the implementation of sun protection strategies and a monitoring and evaluation section. Sample policies are available for you to use

and adapt to suit your school.

When the draft has been written, clearly label it as a draft and make it available for parents and staff to review.

Present the final version of the policy to the appropriate decision making group for endorsement, such as the School Council/Board.

Step 5 – Implement the policy

Officially launch the Sun Protection Policy so that all members of the school community are aware of its existence. This could take place on a special day, at an assembly or at a relevant meeting.

Publicise the policy as widely as possible. Consider giving a copy to all staff, including the policy in a newsletter and distributing information as to the implications for parents and students. Once successfully joined the SunSmart School program, schools receive a sign for external display, a certificate of membership, a sample media release and a sample letter to parents to inform the community of your new SunSmart status and policy.

Cancer Council WA staff are available to present at school assemblies within the Perth metropolitan area and some regional areas. Please contact us arrange an education session.

Step 6 – Monitor and evaluate your Sun Protection Policy

A policy is only as good as its implementation. Routinely promote your policy by:

- Briefing all new staff.
- Including sun protection as a set agenda item on relevant committee meetings at appropriate times, eg, first staff meeting of the year.
- Include information in your parent information booklet.
- Use newsletters and assemblies to promote sun protection.

Review the effectiveness of the policy after a set time period. Involve students where possible. Evaluation strategies could include:

- Conducting a brief survey.
- Making observations, eg, the number of students wearing hats.
- Assessing shade provision.
- Conducting a curriculum audit.

Policy content

Sun protection policies are built on a partnership between school councils/boards, parents and citizens/friends committees, parents, staff and students. The policy should include:

1. Defined goals
2. Policy implementation
    a) Curriculum
    b) Behaviour
    c) Environment
3. Monitoring and evaluation plan

1. Defined goals

Goals for a sun protection policy:

- Increase student and community awareness of skin cancer.
- Adopt practical sun protection measures.
- Develop strategies which encourage responsible decision making about sun protection.
- Work towards a safe school environment which provides shade for students and staff.
- Encourage students, parents, teachers and staff to wear protective clothing, hats and sunscreen for high risk times such as lunch times, sports, excursions and camps.
- Inform parents during student enrolment of the school's Sun Protection Policy.

2. Implementation

a) Curriculum

- Incorporate sun protection and skin cancer prevention programs into the appropriate key learning areas of the school curriculum. Skin cancer awareness issues can be included in Health, Physical Education, or Science activities.
- Events and activities with a particular SunSmart focus should be timetables to coincide with peak UV times.

Professional development

Teachers to have access to up-to-date information on skin cancer and its prevention.

- Professional development sessions for staff and 'quick updates' for staff meetings are conducted by Cancer Council WA staff. Please contact us arrange an education session. This is available to schools in the metropolitan area and some regional areas.
- Teachers and other staff can complete an online learning workshop at www.GenrationSunSmart.com. This is particularly useful as an refresher to a Cancer Council presented professional development session and for new staff that were not able to attend the session.,

b) Behaviour

Personal Protection

Hats

- The recommendation of broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire style hats which provide protection for the face, neck and ears.
- Consideration of a SunSmart hat as part of the school uniform.
- Wearing a SunSmart hat at recess, lunch time and during sporting and other high risk activities.

Protective Clothing

- The recommendation of clothing made of a close-weave material with longer sleeves and collars.

Sunscreen

- The promotion of SPF30 or higher broad-spectrum, water resistant sunscreen.
- Education in the correct application of sunscreen. Visit SunSmart Victoria You Tube Channel for a video of how to apply sunscreen correctly.

School Organisation

Assemblies

- Outdoor assemblies to be held under shade during Terms 1 and 4 where possible, or outside of peak UV periods.

Physical education, sport and swimming

- All students to be sun protected during outdoor physical education and sport classes.
- Maximise the use of indoor and shaded facilities and plan for lessons outside of the high risk UV times.
- Apply the Sun Protection Policy to the swimming program.
- Students who are not actively competing should be encouraged to wear an appropriate sun protective shirt in the water.
- Spectators should observe from a shaded area.

Camps and excursions

- Suitable hats, clothing and sunscreen should be required for all camps and excursions.
- These items should be listed on the parent 'permission' form.
- Appropriate SunSmart behaviour should be modelled by teachers and parents to reinforce the policy.

Adult Role Models

- Appropriate SunSmart behaviour should be modelled by teachers and parents to

reinforce the policy

Recess/Lunchtime

- Students should be required to participate in activities out of the sun if they are not appropriate protected.
- Consideration should be given to students eating their lunches indoors if there is inadequate shade in the yard.

Occupational Safety and Health

- Consideration must be given to sun protection for all teachers involved in outdoor activities including yard duty.
- Physical Education teachers are at a high risk of UV exposure due to the amount of time spent outdoors and must take appropriate sun protection measures.
- The sun protection of tall staff must be considered when developing a sun protection policy.
- Skin cancer prevention strategies should be initiated and implemented through the school in the interests of student and staff health and in the development of a healthy school environment.

c) Environment

- Assess the use of the school grounds in relation to the availability and use of shade.
- Facilities/grounds committee to develop long term shade strategies for the school grounds.
- Shade play equipment.
- Plant shade trees. Consider temporary shade structures as a short term measure.
- Develop shade for high risk areas such as canteens and assembly points.

3. Monitoring and evaluating plan

- Review the sun protective behaviour of students and staff.
- Continue to evaluate and update the skin cancer prevention component of the curriculum.
- Assess plans for future buildings and grounds with regard to shade provision.
- Review the effectiveness of sun protection strategies in your school and make recommendations for improvement if necessary.

Frequently asked questions

What is ultraviolet (UV) radiation?

The sun emits many different types of radiation. As well as the visible light or sunlight, there is invisible radiation. The heat in the sun comes from the infra-red rays. UV radiation is not warm, we neither see it nor feel it, but it can still cause sunburn which can lead to skin cancer, even on cool and cloudy days.

What are the peak radiation times of the day?

The peak radiation times vary throughout the year. The Bureau of Meteorology issues daily UV Alert times which tell us when sun protection is required. UV radiation levels peek at solar noon which is between 12-1pm.

What is the best protection from harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation?

The best protection from UV radiation is to be in the shade, especially during the peak UV radiation times of the day. It is still important to wear a hat, protective clothing and apply SPF30 or higher broad-spectrum, water resistant sunscreen as UV reflects off most surfaces and therefore it is still possible to get burnt, even in the shade.

Should hats be part of the school uniform?

We recommend appropriate hats be included as an integral part of the school uniform. We also recommend a hat for all supervised sports activities. A wide-brimmed hat can cut 50 per cent of the UV radiation to the eyes and face.

What is an appropriate hat?
An appropriate school hat is a broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire style that provides shade for the face, neck and ears. Cancer Council refers to these types of hats as “SunSmart hats”.

How wide should the brim be?
We recommend the brim be between 8 and 10 cm wide, with a minimum of 7.5cm for a broad-brimmed style and 6cm for a bucket style hat. See our SunSmart Hats fact sheet for more details.

Are legionnaire hats the best style for a school hat?
Legionnaire hats offer excellent protection, particularly for the ears and neck and are particularly useful during physical activity. Broad-brimmed hats are often preferred by older students.

Should we let students wear baseball caps and visors?
Baseball caps and visors do not offer adequate protection from harmful UV rays. Cancer Council does not recommend them. Students wearing these hats should be encouraged to play under dense shade and apply SPF30 or higher broad-spectrum sunscreen to the exposed skin on face, neck and ears. The SunSmart Schools program supports schools that have a SunSmart hat as part of their uniform requirements. There is a research paper and journal article what outlines why these styles are not supported or recommended. Contact us to receive a copy.

What about straw hats?
Tightly woven broad-brimmed straw hats offer excellent protection from UV radiation and are generally very light and cool to wear. Straw hats that are loosely woven and let dappled light onto the face should be avoided.

What are the limitations of a hat?
Even when you are wearing a hat, some UV radiation will be reflected onto your face from the surrounding environment. In addition to wearing a SunSmart hat, we recommend the use of SPF 30 or higher sunscreen and playing in shade where possible.

Why do students need to wear protective clothing?

To minimise exposure to UV radiation. Generally students are at school during the peak radiation times of the day and clothing offered good protection without the need to apply sunscreen to the areas of skin covered.

What constitutes good protective clothing?
Cool, comfortable clothing that provides the best protection. The closer the weave the better the protection. Darker colours provide better protection then lighter colours. Look for clothing items that have been tested to UPF50+.

Is cotton a suitable fabric as it is frequently used in school uniforms?
Cotton generally provides very good protection. Testing of different fabrics by the Australian Radiation Laboratory in Melbourne showed that approximately two thirds of cotton/polyester and cotton fabrics offered 95 per cent protection against UV. The tests showed that the tightness of the weave of the fabric was the factor which most affected the amount of UV transmitted.

Is colour a factor when choosing material for a school uniform?
Colour has been found to affect the amount of UV transmitted, with dark colours giving more protection than lighter colours. Dark colours do tend to be less comfortable in hot weather and this may need to be taken into consideration when choosing a garment.

Can you burn through clothing?
Data suggests that the experience of burning through clothing is uncommon and that most of the time clothing is an effective barrier to UV.

What about wet clothing?
Clothing that is wet sometimes loses its protective qualities and this should be considered at swimming sports. Taking along a second dry shirt to change into is recommended.

What about UPF numbers on clothing?
There is a labelling system that informs consumers about the protection offered by the garments they purchase. A UPF (ultraviolet protection factor) rating of 20-29 is considered to give 'high' protection, 30-40 'very high' and ratings of 40+ offer the 'maximum' amount of protection. Generally speaking, most good quality clothing provides the protection you need, the design of the garment is the critical factor.

The development of chemical treatments which claim to improve UV protection of clothing will offer only a minimal benefit and therefore should not be the only consideration when purchasing a garment.

Why use a sunscreen?

Sever sunburn in childhood increases the risk of melanoma, the deadliest type of skin cancer, occurring later in life. It has been estimated that if everyone used SPF 30 or higher broad-spectrum, water resistant sunscreen regularly at least until the age of 18, the number of people getting melanoma could be reduced by over 70 per cent.

What is the role of sunscreen?
Sunscreen is an additional method of protection for exposed skin that cannot be reasonably covered by clothing. Sunscreen should be used as the last option of the five ways to protect yourself from harmful UV radiation.

What is the best sunscreen to use?
A sunscreen labelled SPF30 or higher, broad-spectrum and water resistant is recommended by Cancer Council.

What does broad-spectrum mean?
UV radiation is made up of three components, UVA, UVB, and UVC. Sunscreens marked 'broad-spectrum' offer protection from this spectrum of rays although it should be noted that no UVC from the sun reaches the earth's surface as it is absorbed by the ozone layer.

What is in sunscreen?
Sunscreens contain chemicals which absorb and scatter UV radiation. Most Australian sunscreens use cinnamates, salicylates, or dibenzoylmethanes. Many new products contain zinc or titanium dioxide. You can buy sunscreen as a cream, lotion or gel. All work equally well provided they are of the same SPF.

What is the shelf life of sunscreen?
Most sunscreen will last about two years, and should be stored at a temperature less then 25^0C. All sunscreens should display an expiry date. Dispose of it after this date.

When should zinc cream be used?
Zinc cream is a blockout providing a physical barrier that UV cannot penetrate. It can provide that extra degree of protection required for small sensitive areas such as the nose, lips and ears, particularly while swimming. Zinc cream is not appropriate for larger areas of skin as it does not allow the skin to breathe. Sunscreens are available in a 'clear zinc' formula suitable for whole body application.

What is the best way to apply sunscreen?
Sunscreen should be used on areas not covered by clothing, such as the hands, forearms and face. Hats, clothing and shade provide better non-chemical protection and should be the first choice. Sunscreen should be applied liberally in an even thickness to clean, dry skin. Apply the sunscreen 20 minutes before going outside to allow time for it to interact and bond with the skin. Visit the SunSmart Victoria You Tube Channel for a video of how to apply sunscreen correctly.

How often should sunscreen by re-applied?
Sunscreen should normally be applied every two hours. Be aware that subsequent applications will not provide the same degree of protection offered by the initial application. Over time some UV will be absorbed by your skin and if you remain in the sun for long periods you will eventually burn.

When should water-resistant sunscreen be used?
A water-resistant sunscreen should be used to outdoor swimming lessons and swimming carnivals. Keep in mind that perspiration and towel drying can remove a substantial amount of sunscreen and therefore reapplication is essential. Cancer Coucnil recommends always using a sunscreen that is water resistant.

Should students wear sunglasses?

Long term exposure to the sun may promote eye damage. Consideration should be given to students wearing a hat and sunglasses when outside for any significant periods of time.

What are the best sunglasses for students?
Close fitting wrap-around sunglasses provide the best protection. Significant amounts of UV can still get past the edges of ordinary spectacle frames, even if the lenses themselves block 100 per cent of the UV. The sunglasses should be labelled according to the Standards Association of Australia's Standard AS-1067. Sunglasses labelled as 'fashion spectacles' may not provide sufficient protection from UV. For more information view Cancer Council Australia's Eye Protection position statement.

How can we increase shade at our school?

Cancer Council WA has a publication, The shade handbook, which has been developed for individuals, organisations and local governments to increase the provision of quality shade in the community. This resource will assist schools plan and design appropriate shade for its school grounds. The supplementary materials contain information specific to schools.

Cancer Council WA also has a fact sheet with suggestions of places to apply for funding for shade. Commonwealth and state government departments, as well as local government agencies, also have various grants available. Local community groups such as Rotary and Lions Clubs may also have grants. Keep up-to-date with available grants by checking a grants directory website such as www.ourcommunity.com.au or regularly viewing the websites of grant agencies. If the website has a search engine try searching for 'grant'. Grant directory sites may also provide advice on grant applications. Grants may not be listed as 'shade grants' per se. For instance, community facilities grants may fund installation of shade structures. You may require a little imagination to fit a grant to your desired shade project. Some key words you could search for include: shade, children, facilities, health, safety, physical activity and recreation. Consider contacting the agency to check whether your application appropriately meets their funding criteria.

For a copy (electronic or printed) of *The shade handbook* or *Funding for shade* fact sheet please call the SunSmart Education Coordinator on 9388 4351 or sunsmart@cancerwa.asn.au.

Occupational Safety and Health

Occupation Safety and Health legislation in Australia requires that employers provide and maintain workers with a safe work environment.

Staff working all or part of their day outside should be protected from the sun's UV radiation. For example the school should:

- Provide and maintain equipment needed to protect workers from the sun (hats with a broad brim, long-sleeved shirts, long-legged trousers, sunglasses and sunscreen).
- Set up systems of work to reduce the amount of time workers spend in the sun (timetabling changes to avoid outdoor activities during peak UV radiation periods).

- Provide staff with access to information and training in the area of sun protection.

According to the law your employees have a responsibility to cooperate. For example, if you supply appropriate sun protective equipment, your employees must use it.

Cancer Council WA has a booklet *Occupational exposure too ultraviolet (UV) radiation* outlining workers' compensation claims paid in Australia.

Legal obligations of schools in relation to UV protection

This advice is not intended to be, and does not purport to be, a full statement of the law in relation to the legal obligations of schools and teachers to their students. Individual schools should obtain independent legal advice regarding their legal liability in particular circumstances.

Legal obligations of schools and teachers to their students
Schools and teachers owe a special duty of care to students because of their special relationship with them. Teachers owe their students a duty to take reasonable steps to protect them against risks of injury which the teacher can reasonably forsee. In addition, schools have a duty to take reasonable care of their students while they are on the school premises. This duty is independent of the duty of care owed by teachers to students.

A risk of injury is regarded as foreseeable as long as it is not far-fetched or fanciful. It may be foreseeable even if it is probable that the injury will not occur. If a student under school care is injured and the risk of that injury was foreseeable, then the school or teacher will be regarded as having breached the special duty of care they owe to the student and the student may be entitled to bring legal proceedings against the school and/or teacher.

Since schools and teachers are required by law to take reasonable steps to protect students from the risk of injury which is reasonably foreseeable, ensuring that children are adequately protected from harmful UV radiation may be said to be part of this special duty of care.

Unless students are adequately protected, a situation such as an outdoor school event may expose students to a reasonably foreseeable risk of injury from UV radiation.

Increasing the awareness of students, teachers and schools to the risks involved in exposure to UV rays and the simple protective measures that can be employed, may encourage those precautions to be followed, and may help to reduce the likelihood of injury occurring.

The SunSmart Schools program

Schools across Australia have the opportunity to become SunSmart School by developing comprehensive sun protection policies and completing an application form.

SunSmart Schools receive a large metal SunSmart School sign for display, teacher resource material, a media release to use with their local newspaper and further promotional ideas.

Becoming a SunSmart School tells the community that your school is committed to the future health of its students.

For further information contact:

SunSmart Education Coordinator
15 Bedbrook Pl
SHENTON PARK WA 6008
P: 9388 4351
F: 9388 4399
sunsmart@cancerwa.asn.au