SUN PROTECTION – BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

Background
Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world, caused mainly by exposure to the sun. Despite the fact that skin cancer is largely preventable, one out of every two Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer during their lifetime. Western Australia follows Queensland in being the state to have the second highest incidence of skin cancer in Australia. Evidence clearly shows that sun exposure in childhood and adolescence greatly increases the chances of developing skin cancer in later life.

Ultra Violet Radiation
Although our senses can easily detect sunlight and infrared radiation (heat), they cannot detect the level of Ultra Violet (UV) radiation emitted by the sun. Although UV radiation can’t be seen or felt, it can damage skin in all types of weather. The UV radiation can be reflected by surfaces such as buildings, concrete, sand, snow and water. Exposure to UV radiation can cause damage to the eyes and skin. Damage to the skin may include premature ageing and/or the development of skin cancer.

Australia has high levels of UV radiation, mainly because the country is close to the equator. The higher the UV levels, the less time it takes for skin damage to occur. It can take as little as 15 minutes for sunburn to occur in the summer midday sun with UV radiation levels most intense around the middle of the day. Generally over 70% of the total UV radiation from the sun is received between 10am and 3pm.

How intense is the sun? Using the UV Index:
The UV Index (UVI) indicates the level of UV radiation from the sun. It divides UV radiation levels into low (1–2), moderate (3–5), high (6–7), very high (8–10) and extreme (11 and above).

![UV Index Table]


The higher the UV Index, the more quickly skin damage can occur. The UV radiation forecast should be used as a guide rather than the temperature when planning outdoor activities. The UV forecast is provided by the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and is also reported in some newspaper, radio and television weather reports.

How much sun do we need for healthy bones?

How much sun is needed to achieve adequate levels of Vitamin D?
The majority of Australians achieve adequate Vitamin D levels through the sun exposure they receive during typical day-to-day outdoor activities. During summer, the majority of people can maintain adequate vitamin D levels from a few minutes of exposure to sunlight on their face, arms and hands or the equivalent area of skin on either side of the peak UV periods (10 am to 3 pm) on most days of the week.

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1 Armstrong BK (1997) Melanoma: childhood or lifelong exposure Epidemiology, causes and prevention of skin diseases, Blackwell Science, 63-66
In winter in the southern parts of Australia, where UV radiation levels are less intense, people may need about two to three hours of sunlight to the face, arms and hands, or equivalent area of skin, spread over a week to maintain adequate vitamin D levels. People in southern states may not need sun protection from May to August when the UV Index is likely to be below 3. The only exception is if they are at high altitudes or near highly reflective surfaces like snow.

In winter in northern parts of Australia, people will continue to maintain adequate vitamin D levels going about their day-to-day activities, so it is not necessary to deliberately seek UV radiation exposure.

**How can public schools and colleges manage sun protection effectively?**

Western Australian public schools have a duty of care to support and offer students reasonable protection from the sun. As part of the school’s health education program, a variety of learning activities can be provided to develop students’ knowledge, attitudes and skills about sun protection.

The Department’s **Student Health Care policy** requires Principals to consult with parents, staff and where appropriate, students to develop agreed procedures for promoting effective sun protection. The Cancer Council recommends that school should include the following provisions:

- All students wear a broad-brimmed, legionnaire or bucket (minimum 6cm brim, deep crown) hat when outside.
- Sun protective clothing is considered in the choice or review of the school uniform/dress code.
- Positive role modelling of sun protection behaviour is demonstrated by parents, school staff and volunteers on the school site and during off-site activities, such as excursions.
- The use of SPF 30+, broad spectrum, water resistant sunscreen is encouraged.
- Programs on skin cancer prevention are included in the curriculum.
- The sun protection plan is reflected in the planning of all outdoor events (e.g. camps, excursions and sporting events) and the development of facilities (e.g. building of new play/recreation areas)
- Outdoor activities such as swimming lessons and carnivals are scheduled, whenever possible, to minimise the time outdoors between 10 am and 3 pm.
- The use of shade is maximised during outdoor activities and indoor facilities are used wherever possible.
- The school has sufficient shade or is working towards increasing shade (natural or built) in the school grounds.
- The school reviews its sun protection plan regularly (at least once every two years). This includes monitoring the school’s compliance with the plan and making suggestions for improvement.

**Reduce your risk**

Schools can help protect staff and students against sun damage and skin cancer by using a combination of the following five steps:

1. **Slip on sun protective clothing**
   Cover up as much of the skin as possible.

2. **Slop on SPF 30+ sunscreen**
   Make sure it is broad spectrum and water-resistant.

3. **Slap on a hat**
   Wear a brimmed hat that covers your face, head, neck and ears.

4. **Seek shade**
   Make use of trees or built shade structures – or provide your own!

5. **Slide on some sunglasses**
   Close fitting wrap-around styles offer the best protection.

Extra care should be taken between 10am and 3pm when UV radiation is most intense. Check your skin regularly and seek a doctor if you notice any unusual changes.
More information

The Cancer Council WA can provide additional assistance to schools through the SunSmart Schools Program – for details on this program please contact the Schools Coordinator on 9388 4301.

Further information and educational resources specifically designed for teachers, school health nurses and school administrators can be found at: www.cancerwa.asn.au

For information, facts and support on skin cancer or other cancer issues call The Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.