

Information for primary schools

Being SunSmart during the winter months and vitamin D

“Sensible sun protection does not put people at risk of vitamin D deficiency. But there are times when it’s actually important to leave your hat and sunscreen off.”
(Professor Brenda Wilson, CE of Cancer Council SA)

Cancer Council SA recommends that SA schools implement a comprehensive skin protection policy when the ultraviolet radiation (UVR) levels are 3 and above—this is generally from the beginning of September until the end of April.

During May to August in South Australia, skin protection is not necessary for most people as UV radiation levels generally fall below 3. On a normal school day from May to August, where children are outside for relatively short periods of time—i.e. recess and lunch—the chances of skin damage from the sun for most people is low.

When do we need to take extra care in winter months?

- on clear sunny days in early May and late August when the UV may reach 3 and above during the middle of the day
- if children are outside for long periods of time—e.g. sports day.

On these days, skin protection is still recommended, particularly for children and adults with very fair skin that burns easily.

How can I find out what the UV level is?

There are two tools that will help you.

- look for the SunSmart UV alert on The Advertiser weather page or go to <http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv>. The SunSmart UV alert issued every day by the Bureau of Meteorology when the UV level is

predicated to be 3 and above. It tells you the hours when the UV will be 3 and over, so you know that skin protection is needed (i.e. UV alert 10:30 am – 4:15 pm). When the UV is below 3, no UV alert is issued

- find out what the UV level is in real time at www.arpansa.gov.au/uvindex/realtime/aus_rt.htm. This tells you what the UV is at any time of the day.

How do we get enough vitamin D?

Most people get enough vitamin D if they expose their hands, face and arms to

- **10 minutes** of sunlight **before 10am or after 3pm from September to April** and
- **2–3 hours per week** of cumulative sunlight exposure **from May to August.**

“Anyone who thinks they may be vitamin D deficient should seek medical advice, not seek more sun,”
(Professor Ebeling, Medical Director of Osteoporosis Australia).

What about different skin types?

Children should learn about their own skin type—particularly those with very fair skin, which burns easily—and the importance of skin protection. All children need to protect their eyes from the sun by wearing a hat when the UV is 3 and above.

- children with very fair skin are encouraged to make skin protection a part of their daily routine all year round
- children with dark skin need to protect themselves from the sun as they can still sustain accumulated skin and eye damage
- children with very dark skin do not normally need the same level of sun protection as fair skinned children due to their high level of melanin. It is still

recommended that these children wear a hat to protect their eyes and face

- people with very dark skin need more sun exposure to produce enough vitamin D so it is important that they have some sun on their skin during the winter months

How can we change our school policy?

If schools want to keep an all year round skin protection policy because it is easier to implement and manage, they should consider allowing warm hats, such as beanies, to be worn during the winter months. This helps students keep in the habit of wearing a hat.

Cancer Council SA recommends that policy is in place from 1 September and 30 April. That way, students are protected when UV levels are damaging.

In summary

- a comprehensive SA school skin protection policy should be in place and actively implemented from 1 September until the end of April and when the ultraviolet radiation levels are 3 and above outside of these times
- it is not necessary to wear hats and sunscreen during winter months (May–August) when the UV is below 3
- care should still be taken from May to August if children are outside for an extended period of time on a clear sunny day (e.g. a sports day)

- people with very fair skin that burns easily should always protect themselves from the sun
- further scientific investigation into the amount of ultraviolet radiation exposure required to ensure adequate vitamin D levels for people of different skin types in Australia
- always talk to your doctor if you are concerned about Vitamin D levels.

Find out more

Cancer Council Australia's updated position statement The risks and benefits of sun exposure www.cancer.org.au/positionVitD

General SunSmart information

- www.sunsmart.org.au
- Cancer Council Australia www.cancer.org.au/cancersmartlifestyle/sunsmart

UV information

- Bureau of Meteorology <http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv>
- Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANZA) www.arpansa.gov.au/uvindex/daily/ausuvindex.htm
- real time UVR levels for around Australia www.arpansa.gov.au/uvindex/realtime/ausrealtime.htm

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