



Supporting students to use sunscreen

Supporting students to apply and reapply sunscreen when they are at school can be challenging. Understanding how sunscreen works can make it easier to support students to independently use sunscreen.

What is sunscreen?

Sunscreen is typically a cream or lotion used to help protect your skin from the damaging effects of ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. Sunscreens are usually formulas containing water and oil. When you apply sunscreen to skin, some of it will evaporate or absorb, leaving a protective layer on top of the skin. It usually takes 20 minutes for this protective layer to form, after which the skin will have the full level of protection—stated as the sun protection factor (SPF) on the label.

How does sunscreen work?

Sunscreen ingredients work in two ways; by reflecting and scattering, and/or absorbing UV radiation to stop it reaching the skin. Because sunscreen helps prevent UV radiation from reaching the skin, it helps prevent DNA damage which leads to skin cancer.

Why do we wait 20 minutes after applying sunscreen?

The protective sunscreen layer on top of the skin takes 20 minutes to form. If students go outside before this layer has developed, you risk them having no or reduced protection from the sun and their skin may get damaged.

We must also be careful students do not rub the sunscreen off and allow it to dry during these 20 minutes. Putting clothes on or off, and activities which cause sweating or something rubbing against the skin before the protective layer of sunscreen has formed, will cause uneven and inadequate sunscreen coverage.

It is usually easier to ask students to apply sunscreen prior to arriving at school. Or you may consider having them apply sunscreen at the beginning of the day as they come into the classroom prior to rollcall/attendance.

Do you have to wait 20 minutes before going outside after every application?

Waiting 20 minutes after the first application is important to form the protective layer. Any subsequent applications reinforce this protective layer, and it isn't necessary to wait another 20 minutes.

When products that wash or rub off the sunscreen are used, such as wipes, soap, or oil-based cleansers, you will need to reapply sunscreen and wait 20 minutes before going outside. This gives the protective layer time to form again.

Why do I need to re-apply sunscreen after two hours?

Sunscreen can break down after extended sun exposure. Sunscreen can also be wiped off by students or lost through perspiration and may have been unevenly applied in the first place.

Re-applying sunscreen every two hours helps keep the protective sunscreen layer in place to keep students protected.



SLIP



SLOP



SLAP



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SLIDE

What does broad-spectrum mean?

Broad-spectrum means that a sunscreen provides protection against two types of ultraviolet radiation from the sun (UVA and UVB). If the sunscreen is not broad-spectrum, then it only protects against UVB rays.

Both UVA and UVB contribute to sunburn, skin ageing, eye damage, melanoma and other skin cancers, so it is important to wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen.

The sunscreen label says it's water resistant for up to four hours.

Sunscreen is tested in laboratory conditions, not outside on people where there are real life factors which can reduce the effectiveness of the sunscreen.

Even if the label says the sunscreen is *four-hour water resistant*, sunscreen only maintains its full SPF for a maximum of two hours.

Additionally, when students are outdoors during break times or PE classes, the sunscreen is very likely to be rubbed off through playing or sweating. It is recommended that you reapply every two hours to maintain protection, and always reapply after swimming or water play once the skin is dry.

How do I know when to re-apply?

Reapplication is about maintaining the effectiveness of sunscreen for more than two hours.

Students typically go between indoor and outdoor activities throughout the day. Scheduling set times to reapply sunscreen, such as recess and lunch, eliminates the need for monitoring and ensures two-hourly applications, making it easier to maintain protection.

Water reduces the effectiveness of the sunscreen, so when students are swimming or involved in water activities, they should be reminded to reapply every two hours or immediately after they finish in the water (whichever is sooner). Make sure students are dry before they reapply sunscreen.

Can sunscreen be applied while in the sun?

We recommend applying the first application of sunscreen when indoors or in the shade and waiting 20 minutes for the protective sunscreen layer to form before going out in the sun. Subsequent applications of sunscreen do not require you to wait 20 minutes and can even be reapplied while students are outside, if it is being reapplied every two hours.

What if a student refuses to wear sunscreen?

Inform the family and discuss strategies with them to encourage sunscreen use. Support them to remain in shaded areas and ensure the student is wearing their hat and sun protective clothing when outdoors.

Can we still use SPF30 or SPF30+ sunscreen?

SPF relates to the amount of time it takes for redness to appear on the skin compared to when no product is used at all (in a laboratory setting). A higher SPF means greater protection is provided.

While Cancer Council SA recommends choosing an SPF50 or SPF50+ sunscreen, it is safe to continue to use an SPF30 or SPF30+ sunscreen, as it still provides a high level of protection.



Tips to support sunscreen application:

- Choose weekly sunscreen monitors for the classroom. These students could check the daily UV rating using the SunSmart app. When the rating is going to be 3 or above, sunscreen monitors can help get out the sunscreen and remind other students to put it on.
- Pair students with a sunscreen buddy so they can help each other to apply sunscreen. Buddies will be able to see if the other has missed any spots when applying.
- Encourage families to apply sunscreen before coming to school. This reinforces positive sun protection practices at home and familiarises students with the application of sunscreen.
- Schedule set times (across the school) for sunscreen to be reapplied to all students. On arrival and before lunch are easy times to remember, and both will ensure the protective sunscreen layer is maintained for outdoor play or lessons either side of these times.
- Set up a sunscreen station with a mirror to help make it easier for students to apply their own sunscreen.
- If the school doesn't provide sunscreen, include regular reminders to families via the newsletter or app to bring their own sunscreen to school.
- Student leaders can make sunscreen application reminder announcements over the PA before recess and/or lunch
- Sunscreen pump packs are ideal for classrooms as they are cost effective and usually easier to use. For younger students, you could encourage them to bring their own roll-on sunscreen to support independent application.
- Make it fun! Encourage students to put a dot of sunscreen on each cheek, their nose and chin and rub it in with squiggles. Or try drawing sunscreen letters and numbers on arms and legs.
- Find a way to record each time sunscreen is applied, such as a chart with stickers. Run a competition to see which students are the sunscreen champions. or include sunscreen applications as part of existing reward programs.

More information and resources:

We recommend reading this resource in conjunction with [Sunscreen Fact Sheet](#).

More information is available at www.sunsmart.org.au