Department of
Education

SUN PROTECTION - BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

EFFECTIVE: 2014

VERSION: 1

BACKGROUND

SKIN CANCER

Australians have the highest rate of skin cancer in the world, caused mainly by overexposure to ultraviolet radiation (UV) from the sun. UV radiation is now listed as a Group 1 carcinogen by the World Health Organization. Group 1 carcinogens are proven to cause cancer in humans. UV radiation is increasingly being recognised as a workplace hazard that employers must manage and compensation claims for UV related skin damage are increasing in Australian courts.

Western Australia has the second highest incidence of skin cancer in Australia after Queensland.[1] Evidence clearly shows that sun exposure in childhood and adolescence greatly increases the chances of developing skin cancer in later life.[1] Despite the fact that skin cancer is largely preventable, one out of every two Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer during their lifetime.

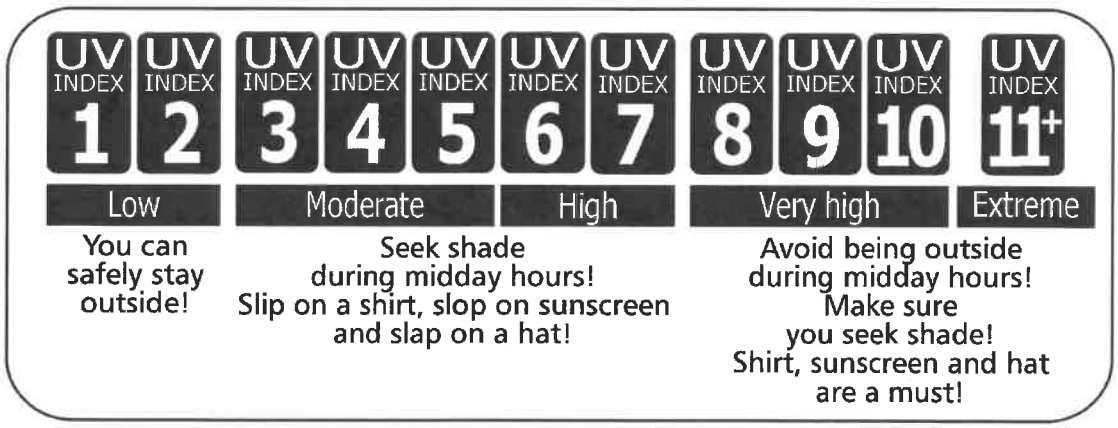
ULTRAVIOLET RADIATION

We can see visible sunlight and detect infrared (heat) radiation, but we cannot feel the UV radiation emitted by the sun. Cool days have low infrared radiation but regularly have high UV radiation levels. This is why we get sunburnt on cool days. UV radiation can damage the DNA in skin cells once it becomes strong enough. Damage to the skin can result in premature ageing and/or the development of skin cancer. Overexposure to UV radiation can also damage the eyes.

Australia generally has very strong UV radiation, mainly because it is close to the equator. The higher the UV levels, the less time it takes for skin damage to occur. It takes as little as 10 minutes for sunburn to occur in the summer midday sun. UV radiation levels are 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.

THE UV INDEX

The UV Index indicates the strength of UV radiation reaching the ground. Sun protection is strongly recommended when the UV Index is 3 or higher.



[World Health Organization (2002) Global UV Index: A practical guide]

[1] Armstrong BK (1997) Melanoma: childhood or lifelong exposure Epidemiology, causes and prevention of skin diseases, Blackwell Science, 63-66

The higher the UV Index, the stronger the UV radiation and the faster skin damage can occur. The UV radiation forecast (and not the temperature) should be used as the guide when assessing sunburn risk for outdoor activities. UV levels rise through the morning and fall in the afternoon. Your local UV forecast will give you the day's maximum UV strength and period when UV will be 3 or higher. The UV forecast is available through the SunSmart mobile phone app, the Bureau of Meteorology website, at www.myuv.com.au, and is also reported in some newspaper, radio and television weather reports.

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SUN PROTECTION BY PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Western Australian public schools have a duty of care to offer students reasonable protection from the sun. The Department's *Student Health Care* policy requires Principals to consult with parents, staff and where appropriate, students to implement agreed procedures for promoting effective protection from the sun and UV radiation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CANCER COUNCIL WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The following recommendations from the Cancer Council WA should be considered when schools are developing agreed procedures for effective protection from the sun and UV radiation. The Cancer Council WA recommends that schools employ these provisions whenever school activities require staff or students to be outside while the UV Index is 3 or higher:

- All staff/students wear a broad-brimmed, legionnaire or bucket (minimum 6cm brim, deep crown) hat when outside. Caps are not sun protective and should not be permitted.
- Staff and students wear clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
- The use of SPF30 or higher, broad spectrum, water resistant sunscreen is encouraged.
- The use of shade is maximised during outdoor activities and indoor facilities are used wherever possible.
- Adults should wear sunglasses. Students should have the option to wear them.
- When outdoor activities are scheduled at times when the UV Index is 3 or higher, maximum use is made of shade, sunscreen, hats and long clothing to protect students and staff.
- 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.

Additionally, the Cancer Council Western Australia recommends broadly that schools should:

- Consider longer style clothing for the school uniform/dress code (i.e. collared shirts, elbow length sleeves, longer shorts, skirts or long pants).
- Ensure the sun protection plan is evident 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)
- Include lessons on skin cancer prevention in the curriculum.
- Ensure the school has sufficient shade or is working towards increasing shade (natural or built) in the school grounds.

- Ensure 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.

KEY STEPS

Effective sun protection requires the use of as many of these 5 strategies as possible when the UV Index is 3 or higher.

1. Slip on sun protective clothing
Cover up as much of the skin as practical. Consider shirts with collars, elbow length sleeves or longer. Longer style shorts or use long pants. The best sun protective fabrics have an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) rating of 50+.

2. Slop on SPF30 or higher sunscreen
Make sure it is broad spectrum and water-resistant. Encourage staff and students to reapply every 2 hours if outside that long.

3. Slap on a hat
Wear a brimmed hat that covers your face, head, neck and ears. Baseball caps do not provide useful sun protection.

4. Seek shade
Make use of available shade. Where this is insufficient provide artificial shade.

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

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 (i.e. when UV is above 3) on most days of the week.

In June and July in the southern parts of Western Australia, where midday UV radiation levels do not reach 3, 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.

MORE INFORMATION

Cancer Council WA can provide additional assistance to schools through the SunSmart Schools program – for details about this FREE program please contact the SunSmart Education Coordinator on 9388 4351.

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.