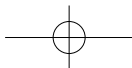
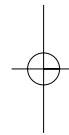
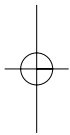




*The use of sunscreens
in schools: a good
practice guide*



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Introduction

As part of the Sun Know How Campaign in 1998, the Health Education Authority (HEA) published *Sun Safety Guidelines for Schools*. The aim of the guidelines is to help schools implement sun safety measures as part of the Government's programme to reduce the incidence of skin cancer. Research in the late 1980s by Learning through Landscapes found that young people spend a quarter of the time they are at school outdoors. Schools can therefore play a key role in preventing skin damage caused through overexposure to sunlight.

The HEA guidelines promote practical measures to protect pupils and staff from the sun and encourage the incorporation of education about sun safety into the curriculum. The sun protection measures include:

- provision of shade so that pupils can stay out of the sun
- advocating appropriate clothing and hats so that pupils can cover up
- use of high Sun Protection Factor (SPF) sunscreens.

Concerns expressed by head teachers and teaching unions about the use of sunscreens in schools resulted in a meeting at the HEA to discuss the issues. The main points of concern expressed by teachers and the teaching unions are:

- the contractual issue
- the potential for allegations of abuse
- logistical problems, including the encroachment on learning time, and
- the cost.

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The meeting held in December 1998 involved the main teaching unions, Local Government Association, dermatologists, the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment. This good practice guide was produced as a result of that meeting and, at the time of going to press, is endorsed by:

Department for Education and Employment
Department of Health
Local Government Association
NASUWT
National Union of Teachers
Professional Association of Teachers
UK Skin Cancer Working Party

The purpose of this supplementary guidance is to clarify the position with regard to sunscreen use in schools and to highlight the main points schools need to consider. Sun safety should be viewed as part of a whole school policy that seeks to encourage the health, safety, well-being and education of its pupils. Parents have a vital role to play and their support and involvement is essential.

Background

The incidence of skin cancer in the UK has doubled over the last 15 years and continues to rise. It is the most common form of cancer in the country and is almost always caused by the sun. Skin cancer is therefore preventable and by protecting the skin of young children and teenagers it is possible to reduce the risk of sunburn and cumulative damage caused by the sun. There is evidence that sunburn in childhood increases the risk of skin cancer later in life.

SKIN COLOUR

Some people are more at risk of skin cancer than others. People with fair or freckled skin who burn easily are most at risk and should take great care when out in the sun. Brown skinned people have a much lower risk of sunburn but still need to take care in stronger sun, for example tropical sun. Black skinned people hardly ever burn and have a very low risk of skin cancer because their skin has naturally high levels of protective melanin, the pigment that gives skin its colour. People with brown or black skin do not normally need to protect themselves with sunscreen in the UK although they should avoid excessive sun exposure because of the risk of over-heating and dehydration.

It is helpful if schools explain the different levels of risk to staff, parents and pupils so everyone is clear who is most at risk and why this group might receive special attention.

SELECTING SUNSCREEN PRODUCTS

Sunscreen is usually available as a cream, lotion or spray. It acts either as a physical barrier to the sun, reflecting the sun's harmful

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UV radiation, or it contains chemical absorbers that soak up UV radiation, reducing the amount that reaches the skin. Some products combine both methods. Sunscreen products do not contain peanut oil so allergies are rare and generally not serious. If an allergy occurs, the sunscreen should be removed and the skin bathed in cool water. Medical assistance should be sought if the allergy persists.

The ability of sunscreens to protect against the amount of UV radiation that reaches the skin is measured in terms of the SPF. All products sold in the UK carry an SPF rating that ranges from 2 to 30+. The higher the factor, the greater the protection.

The SPF number indicates how long a person can stay in the sun without burning, compared with the length of time it takes to burn without sunscreen. For example, if a person normally starts to burn after about 10 minutes, then it will take that person approximately 150 minutes to start to burn if they use a sunscreen with a SPF of 15 (i.e. 10×15).

Sunscreen products should *not* be used to increase the amount of time spent in the sun. Press reports that link the incidence of skin cancer with people who use sunscreen products probably reflect the greater use of sunscreen by 'sun worshippers' in the past who used the products to enable them to spend more time in the sun.

Within the UK a sunscreen product with an SPF of 15–20 will provide sufficient protection for pupils at school. A higher factor is not deemed necessary. Schools may decide to ban the use of aerosol sprays because of the risk of misuse.

The use of sunscreen products in schools

The purpose of a school policy on sun safety is to protect staff and pupils from sunburn. The use of sunscreens in schools is only one of a range of sun safety measures to prevent sunburn during the summer months but should be encouraged when other preventive measures, such as shade or protective clothing, are unavailable or impractical, or as additional protection.

Background

Sunscreen products are not classified as a medicine. However, the implications for sunscreen use in school are analogous to that of medicines. In particular, it is for authorities, schools and governing bodies to formulate their own policies. These should clearly state the school's position on the use of sunscreens and the circumstances in which they can be used. Teachers and other support staff are not legally obliged to administer sunscreens, and the support and cooperation of parents is essential. Schools may find it helpful to refer to the joint Department for Education and Employment and Department of Health guidance (1996) *Supporting pupils with medical needs. A good practice guide.*

Legal position

Parents or guardians are a child's main carers and have prime responsibility for their child's health. The employer, generally the school governing body or the LEA has legal responsibilities under common law and also under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

The following is not a definitive summary of the law but a clarification of areas that have caused some confusion with regard to the use of sunscreen products in schools.

- Under the terms and conditions of their contracts, teachers are not required to administer medicines or to give first aid to pupils. There is however no legislation that prevents teachers and support staff from administering sunscreens but this would have to be on a purely voluntary basis. Teachers will use their professional judgement to decide whether or not they volunteer to administer medication or sunscreen.
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees at work. Those in charge of non-domestic premises such as schools have a duty under the Act towards anyone using their premises even though such persons may not be employees. School employers are therefore responsible for the health and safety of teaching and non-teaching staff, pupils, and others who may use school premises. The health and safety legislation requires employers to have a written health and safety policy and to conduct risk assessments. The potential for prolonged exposure to the sun and the risk of sunburn while at school or on school outings should be considered as part of the risk assessment process and measures put in place to minimise the risk.

Legal position

- The Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981 require workplaces to implement first aid policies and procedures. Although employers are not obliged under the Regulations to provide first aid to anyone other than staff, they do have health and safety responsibilities towards non-employees. The HSC recommends that schools include pupils and non-staff members in any risk assessment procedures and in the arrangements for first aid provision. Treating a pupil for sunburn would fall within the definition of first aid. DfEE (1998) *Guidance on First Aid for Schools* states: 'Teachers and other staff in charge of pupils are expected to use their best endeavours at all times, particularly in emergencies, to secure the welfare of the pupils at the school in the same way that parents might be expected to act towards their children. In general, the consequences of taking no action are likely to be more serious than those of trying to assist in an emergency' (para 17). The use of sunscreens is a preventive measure that would obviate the need for first aid to treat sunburn.
- Physical contact with children can put teachers and support staff at risk of allegations of abuse but physical contact is not, itself, unlawful. Teachers and authorised staff can use reasonable force to control and restrain pupils, according to education legislation, and physical contact is appropriate in other circumstances (Section 550A of the Education Act 1996). For example, when demonstrating exercises or techniques in PE, giving first aid, or when young children or those with special educational needs may need physical prompts or help. The latter may be necessary with regard to the application of sunscreen. This good practice guide provides advice to minimise the risk of abuse allegations.

Who is responsible for sun protection at school?

PARENTS AND CARERS

Parents and carers have the prime responsibility for their children's health and welfare. They can ensure that their children are adequately protected by providing them with:

- appropriate clothing, including hats, between April and September
- a high factor sunscreen (SPF 15+). Applying sunscreen before school will not provide adequate protection all day.

Parents' co-operation in decisions concerning their child's safety at school is essential. Many adults are unaware of the prevalence of skin cancer and some do not consider that there is a risk in the UK. Schools can help educate parents about the risk and gain their support for sun protection measures at school, including, where necessary, their permission for sunscreen to be administered by an approved person. A sample letter for parents and consent form can be found at the back of this booklet.

THE EMPLOYER AND THE GOVERNING BODY

While children are at school, however, it is the responsibility of the education authority, the school and governing body to ensure that adequate protection is provided for pupils and that pupils adhere to school procedures. The school employer, generally the school governing body or the LEA, is responsible for ensuring there is a health and safety policy. This should be based upon a risk assessment that includes the risk of exposure to the sun, both at school and on excursions. The use of sunscreens is one of the measures available for minimising this risk.

Who is responsible for sun protection at school?

Individual schools will develop their own policies to cover their sun safety needs in conjunction with any LEA guidance. The governing body is generally responsible for all school policies and will wish to consult staff and parents. Given the cost of sunscreen products, schools will need to consider the question of who provides sunscreens. School budgets may not extend to the cost. However, if parents *are* asked to supply them some children may be disadvantaged and a policy should be inclusive. The LEA may be able to help or schools may consider providing a limited supply of sunscreen for children who cannot, or forget to, bring sunscreen to school. Certain indicators can be used to assess the likely demand and cost, including the number of fair-skinned pupils in the school and those entitled to free school meals. The HEA is working towards persuading sunscreen manufacturers to offer sunscreen products at reduced rates to schools.

TEACHERS AND OTHER SCHOOL STAFF

The head teacher is responsible for implementing school policies and informing parents. It is the responsibility of the head teacher to develop the procedures in more detail and to ensure that staff receive appropriate guidance and support.

Teachers, classroom assistants, support workers, parent/adult helpers and nursery nurses are responsible for the pupils in their care and need to understand the school's policy and procedures and be clear about their role. Staff in charge of young children or those with special needs may agree, in consultation with the governing body and head teacher, to apply sunscreen on a voluntary basis. They are not contractually obliged to do so and teaching unions support their members' decisions, whether they refuse or agree to administer them.

Good practice guide

Schools have an important role in child protection. Protection from the sun is one of many health and safety issues that schools will wish to address with the involvement of parents.

The following principles inform this good practice guide:

- Sun safety measures should be an integral part of a whole school policy.
- The use of sunscreens is only one sun safety measure to be considered.
- Parental permission and involvement in the implementation of sun safety measures is essential.
- Self-application of sunscreen by pupils is the preferred option and practical in most circumstances.
- The school policy should explain those circumstances where assistance with sunscreen application by teachers or support workers is necessary.
- The school policy should be developed in consultation with staff and parents.

When is sun protection necessary?

Sun protection measures include the provision of shade, appropriate clothing and hats, and the use of high factor sunscreens. These should apply to teaching and non-teaching staff, particularly those who work outdoors, and pupils. People with fair skin and freckles who burn easily are at greatest risk. Staff and pupils with brown or black skin do not normally need to protect themselves with sunscreen in the UK although they should avoid

excessive exposure to the sun to avoid the effects of dehydration and overheating.

If schools include the risk of sunburn in their health and safety risk assessment procedure, they will be able to identify the times, places, and circumstances when protection is most needed and implement measures to reduce the risks.

Protection against the sun is necessary when UV radiation levels are at their highest. In the UK this is:

- between April and September
- between 11 am and 3 pm
- on cloudless days even when the temperature is not high or there is a cooling wind (although cloud reduces UV levels, it is still possible to burn under light cloud)
- when UV is also reflected, adding to the overall intensity that reaches the skin; light surfaces like concrete, water, sand and snow reflect UV.

Sunscreens should not be used to prolong the amount of time spent in the sun but as a form of protection when other measures are unavailable or impractical, or when additional protection is required. At school, this would include:

- outdoor breaks, particularly lunch breaks
- PE, swimming, or other outdoor lessons
- sports days
- school excursions, including winter ski-ing trips.

During sports events and school excursions pupils and staff who are most at risk of sunburn should be encouraged to cover up at all times unless they are swimming. Shirts should always be worn during PE.

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How should sunscreen be applied?

The protective effect of sunscreen products is reduced over time as the sunscreen is absorbed and/or rubbed-off. Sunscreen applied before school provides insufficient protection for a whole day. Therefore schools need to consider the use of sunscreens by pupils most at risk of sunburn, during school hours.

Most children will be able, with some direction, to apply sunscreens themselves. **Self-application is recommended.** This prevents allegations of abuse and encroachment into learning time.

It is important to apply sunscreens correctly and teachers need to advise pupils to:

- use about a dessert spoon of the cream/lotion (sufficient for a child)*
- spread it evenly over the exposed areas of the body (face, neck, arms and legs) with particular attention to those areas that burn easily, such as the ears and neck
- rub it in well.

Young children and some children with special needs may require assistance. The DfEE Circular 10/98 *Section 550A of the Education Act 1996: The Use of Force to Control or Restrain Pupils* states with regard to physical contact in circumstances other than restraint: 'Teachers will use their own professional judgement when they feel a pupil needs this kind of support.' (para. 33). The guidance also states that teachers should avoid touching a pupil in a way that might be considered indecent and should be aware of those children for whom touching is unwelcome, possibly because of their cultural background, or because they have been abused (para. 34).

Permission for someone else to apply sunscreen must be gained from parents and carers. Teachers who do help to apply sunscreens should do so only to the face, neck and arms and in accordance with relevant school policies to minimise the risk of abuse allegations.

* The equivalent for babies and adults is about a teaspoon and tablespoon respectively.

Sun safety policy and procedures

The HEA's *Sun Safety Guidelines for Schools* (1998) describes the purpose of a sun safety policy and provides a model policy that schools can adapt. Sun safety should be part of a whole school policy.

A clear policy and well documented procedures that are communicated to staff and parents can protect the school from complaints and allegations of abuse. The use of sunscreens can have implications for the health and safety policy, the medicines in school policy, or the policy regarding physical contact.

There are a number of issues that schools should consider or emphasise in relation to the procedures regarding sunscreen use:

- that sun safety is a health and safety issue
- how to inform parents and seek their consent (see model letter and form in the Appendix)
- when sunscreen use will be permitted or encouraged at school
- who will provide the sunscreen and whether certain products (such as aerosols) are banned
- who is at risk of sunburn, making clear the implications of skin colour
- rules regarding the carrying and self-application of sunscreens
- circumstances in which physical prompts may be necessary and any rules regarding physical contact
- the consequences if children refuse to use sunscreens.

Further reading

Health Education Authority

Sun Safety: Guidelines for Schools. Parts 1 and 2. (1998)

The Sun Know How Campaign at the HEA produces a campaign pack which includes information on the full range of resources available.

For copies contact:

Health Education Authority
Sun Know How Campaign
Trevelyan House
30 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW
Tel: 0171 413 1975

Department for Education and Employment

Department for Education and Employment and Department of Health (1996) *Supporting pupils with medical needs: a good practice guide.*

Department for Education and Employment (1998) *Guidance on first aid for schools: a good practice guide.*

Department for Education and Employment Circular 10/98
Section 550A of the Education Act 1996: *The use of force to control or restrain pupils.*

DfEE publications are available free from:

Further reading

DfEE Publications Centre
PO Box 5050
Sudbury
Suffolk CO10 6ZQ
Tel: 0845 6022260
Fax: 0845 6033360
e-mail: dfee@prologcs.demon.co.uk

Health and Safety Executive

HSE (1994) *Managing health and safety in schools* £5.95

HSE Books
P O Box 1999
Sudbury
Suffolk CO10 6FS
Tel: 01787 881165
Fax: 01787 313995
HSE InfoLine: 0541 545500

Appendix

SAMPLE PARENTAL FORMS/DOCUMENTS

These should be adapted by schools to suit their individual needs.

Form 1. Model letter to parents informing them about the school's approach to sun safety.

Date

Dear Parent

Sun Safety at School

The school is concerned about protecting staff and pupils from sunburn and from skin damage that can be caused by the harmful ultra-violet rays in sunlight. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the country. As sunburn and almost all skin cancer is caused by the sun, it is possible to prevent this happening. The school believes that by encouraging sun safe behaviour at school and teaching children about the risks of sunlight, we can prevent them burning and contribute towards preventing skin cancer.

The school would like your help and support in this matter. We will be encouraging children to avoid sunburn and overexposure to the sun by:

- seeking the shade, particularly during the middle of the day
- wearing suitable hats
- wearing clothing that protects the skin, particularly for outdoor activities and school trips
- using a high factor sunscreen (SPF 15+).

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Staff will be encouraged to set an example. The school is reviewing the amount of shade available and considering what can be done about clothing and hats. Your views are welcomed.

Some children are at greater risk of sunburn than others. Fair skinned, freckled children who burn easily are most at risk from overexposure to the sun and need to take great care when out in the sun. Brown skinned children have a much lower risk of sunburn but still need to take care and protect themselves in stronger sunlight. Black skinned children hardly ever burn and have a very low risk of skin cancer. Those with brown or black skin do not normally need to use sunscreen in the UK but should avoid overexposure to the sun to prevent dehydration and overheating. Babies, regardless of their skin colour, should be kept out of direct sunlight. Teachers and support staff on outdoor duties or in charge of school outings will remind those most at risk of burning to cover up in the sun and use sunscreen.

You can help by encouraging your child to bring, and wear, a hat at school, particularly on sports days and school excursions. Also by encouraging your child to wear longer sleeved shirts and longer shorts when outdoors. The school will remind parents of the sun safety policy from time to time, particularly around the start of the summer term, sports days, and outings.

Sunscreens provide added protection and may be useful when other measures are not available. Dermatologists recommend that a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or above will provide children in this country with adequate protection.

Either:

This school encourages parents to provide sunscreen for this purpose. The rules/procedures for the use of sunscreens at school are attached. I would ask that you complete the attached form so that the school has a record of your support for the sun safety policy and your wishes with regard to sunscreen use by your child/ren. Please note that the school does not permit the use of aerosol sprays.

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Or:

This school is able to provide sunscreen for the protection of pupils at certain times as laid down in the attached rules/procedures. The particular sunscreen used is (insert name of product). I would ask that you complete the attached form so that the school has a record of your support for the sun safety policy and your wishes with regard to sunscreen use by your child/ren.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

Form 2. Parental consent form

The school wishes to encourage pupils to protect themselves from the sun. One way of doing this is to use sunscreen at the appropriate time. You are asked to sign this form to show that you have received the letter about the school's approach to sun safety and support the school's policy.

Not all children are at equal risk of sunburn. If your child is at risk and you wish him/her to use a sunscreen at school, please indicate this below. You are asked to say whether you will provide a sunscreen/or whether you agree to your child using the product supplied by the school.

For early years and special needs schools, the following may be added if appropriate:

The school policy states that whenever possible teachers will supervise the application of sunscreen. Sometimes it may be necessary for teachers or support staff to help children apply the sunscreen. Please indicate below whether you are happy for approved teaching, support staff, and parent/adult helpers to do this.

If your child has any allergies or skin sensitivities you may want to check with your GP before providing a sunscreen/or allowing your child to use the school-provided product. The school will inform

Appendix: Parental forms/documents

you if your child has any adverse reaction that may be due to the sunscreen, and will take medical advice if necessary.

PUPIL DETAILS

Surname:

Forename(s):

Address:

M/F

Date of Birth:

Class/form:

please tick:

I have read and support the school's sun safety policy.

I will provide my child/ren with a non-aerosol sunscreen product for use at school and on school outings in accordance with the school's procedures.

I am happy for my child/ren to use the named sunscreen provided by the school in accordance with the school's procedures.

I give my permission for approved teachers and support staff to apply sunscreen when this is considered necessary.

Signature Date