



Sun Safety for Students

Sunscreen

Sunscreen that is SPF 30+ (or higher), broad spectrum and water resistant is recommended.

Sunscreen reduces the amount of ultraviolet radiation reaching the skin.

Cancer Council NSW recommends that when ultraviolet levels are 3 or above sunscreen should be used in conjunction with other forms of sun safety such as clothing, hats and shade.

Sunscreen works by filtering ultraviolet radiation with a chemical barrier that absorbs and/or reflects the ultraviolet rays away from the skin. No sunscreen provides 100 per cent protection against ultraviolet radiation, and some ultraviolet radiation will always reach the skin, damaging the cells below. This damage builds up over time and can increase the risk of melanoma and other skin cancers.

How does ultraviolet radiation damage the skin?

Ultraviolet radiation penetrates the skin causing damage to the cells. Advice from Cancer Council NSW indicates that SPF 30+ broad spectrum sunscreen filters out approximately 97 per cent of ultraviolet radiation if used properly.

Sunscreen that is at least SPF30+, broad spectrum and water resistant is recommended.

For sunscreen to be most effective it needs to be applied 20 minutes before going out into the sun and reapplied every two hours while outdoors.

What is the SPF number on sunscreen labels?

SPF stands for sun protection factor. A sunscreen is given an SPF number of between 4 and 50 after laboratory testing.

The higher the SPF number, the more protection the sunscreen provides against sunburn. The SPF should only be used as a guide. The length of time it takes any one person to sunburn is affected by many other things, including:

- Ultraviolet levels – the higher the ultraviolet levels the more quickly skin damage and sunburn will occur.
- A person's skin type – fair skin will burn more quickly than olive or dark skin.

- How well sunscreen has been applied – it is important to use enough sunscreen to achieve the SPF protection level stated on the label.

What is broad spectrum sunscreen?

UVA and UVB both contribute to sunburn, skin ageing, eye damage, melanoma and other skin cancers.

A broad-spectrum sunscreen filters out both ultraviolet-A (UVA) and ultraviolet-B (UVB) radiation.

Ultraviolet radiation comes in different wavelengths called UVA and UVB.

Does sunscreen prevent Vitamin D productions?

Regular use of sunscreen when the ultraviolet index is 3 or above does not greatly decrease vitamin D levels over time. If people are concerned about developing a vitamin D deficiency they should raise these concerns with their doctor.

Sunscreen should be used in combination with other sun safety measures.



Can sunscreen cause skin allergies?

Allergic reactions to sunscreen are usually caused by perfumes and/or preservatives in the product, not the chemicals that filter ultraviolet radiation.

If someone has an allergic reaction to a sunscreen, they can seek medical advice.

The Cancer Institute NSW recommends that for sensitive skin it may be best to use a fragrance free sunscreen with zinc or titanium dioxide. Alcohol or gel-based sunscreens are least likely to aggravate acne.

Considerations for schools.

Encourage school community members to use a 30+ (or higher), broad spectrum and water resistant sunscreen.

Determine what the role of the school will be in providing sunscreen for students.

- Will students be asked to provide their own sunscreen for reapplication during the day?
- Will the school supply sunscreen?
- Will sunscreen be made available in key locations for students to use?
- Will the school P&C contribute to the cost of sunscreen?
- Will a combination of the above be used?

Use a variety of strategies to communicate with families, students and the wider school community about the importance of sun safe behaviours including why it is important to use a SPF 30+ (or higher), broad spectrum and water resistant sunscreen.

Sunscreen needs to be applied 20 minutes before going outside for it to be effective. Students and staff can be encouraged to apply sunscreen 20 minutes before going outside where practicable.

Families can be encouraged to:

- ensure that their child has sunscreen applied before coming to school
- send sunscreen to school with their children for either self application, or in the case of students with a disability, application by staff at key points during the day
- supply a roll-on style applicator for easier application, particularly for younger students.

If schools choose to supply and reapply sunscreen:

- access information provided by parents/carers about known allergies and ask parents/carers to notify the school if their child has an allergy to a chemical, fragrance or colouring agent in sunscreen that they have not already identified

- students with an allergy to a sunscreen ingredient can be asked to provide their own sunscreen for individual use
- parents/carers should be notified of the brand of sunscreen product available.

Suggested resources

- Sunscreen – the facts.
http://www.darksideoftanning.com.au/pdf/facts-sheet_sunscreen.html
- Cancer Council NSW SunSmart information sheets
<http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/23999/reduce-risks/sun-protection/sunsmart-program-for-primary-schools-and-ohsc/sunsmart-resources/information-sheets/?pp=37078>

For further information

[Sun safety website](#)

Student Engagement and Interagency Partnerships

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