



Sun Safety in Schools

Note: This policy brief updates and expands CSBA's 2002 advisory on "How to Protect Students from Overexposure to Ultraviolet Radiation."

Background: The Harmful Effects of Overexposure to Sun

Research indicates that overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation causes 65-90 percent of all skin cancers, as well as sunburns, premature aging, cataracts, and a weakened immune system.^{1,2} Sun damage and skin cancer are of particular concern for Californians. About one in four Californians are at risk of developing skin cancer, which is higher than the national average of one in five.³ In 2006, an estimated 5,810 new cases of melanoma, the most deadly type of skin cancer, are expected in the state.⁴

Although skin cancer and cataracts often do not manifest until adulthood, the damage from UV radiation is cumulative and begins in childhood. On school campuses, both students and school personnel typically spend a significant amount of time outdoors. Thus, it is important that governing boards, district staff, and school staff are aware of the dangers and actively promote protection against overexposure to UV radiation.

Skin cancer is now considered to be an epidemic by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "There is good news: skin cancer can be prevented. The challenge, however, lies in changing the attitudes and behaviors that increase a person's risk of developing skin cancer."

—David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D., Surgeon General
1998-2002

Sun Safety Measures

Protection against the sun is recommended as the most effective method for preventing skin cancer. Preventive measures recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the California Department of Health Services, the California nonprofit organization Sun Safety for Kids, and others include:

- limiting time in the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are the strongest;
- seeking shade (trees and structures);
- using sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays and has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher, applying it 15-20 minutes before exposure, and reapplying every two hours;
- wearing a wide-brimmed hat that protects the face, ears, and neck;
- covering up with tightly woven, loose-fitting, and full-length clothing;
- wearing sunglasses, especially wrap-around style, that block 99-100 percent of UV radiation;
- wearing UV-protective lip balm;
- avoiding sunlamps and tanning beds; and
- monitoring the UV Index, which is available daily for all zip code areas across the United States.

¹ California Department of Health Services, Skin Cancer Prevention Program, School Systems: The Importance of Promoting and Providing Sun Protection, 2006

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer, 2002

³ Dr. Hayes Gladstone, assistant professor of dermatology at Stanford University Medical Center, cited in Bearman, K., "Health & Fitness: Taking Cover—Skin-cancer risk to kids prompts senator to push for more education, prevention measures," *The Almanac*, July 13, 2005

⁴ American Cancer Society, Estimated New Cancer Cases for Selected Cancer Sites by State, U.S., 2006, www.cancer.org

The UV Index, developed by the National Weather Service and the Environmental Protection Agency, predicts the next day's UV radiation levels on a scale ranging from 1 (low risk of harm from solar UV radiation) to 11+ (extreme risk), and can be used to determine appropriate sun-protective behaviors. The EPA issues a UV Alert when the risk of solar UV radiation is predicted to be unusually high. For further information about the UV Index, or to find the daily index for a particular zip code or city, see www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html. For most areas of California, the UV Index is highest from March through October.

Policy Considerations for School Boards

Schools are important partners in protecting students from overexposure to UV radiation. They can work to provide a sun-safe school environment, encourage students to practice sun-safe behaviors when they go outside during the school day, and teach students the knowledge, motivation, and skills they need to adopt and maintain sun-safe behaviors for a lifetime.

CSBA's sample board policy BP 5141.7—Sun Safety, issued in July 2006, expands on material formerly found in BP 5142—Safety. Sample administrative regulation AR 5132—Dress and Grooming and BP/AR 6142.8—Comprehensive Health Education also contain relevant language. As district governance teams review CSBA's materials and develop or revise their own policies on sun safety, they should consider the following issues:

Sun-protective clothing and sunglasses

Education Code 35183.5 requires that students be allowed to wear hats and other sun-protective clothing outdoors during the school day. Schools, however, retain authority to prohibit specific clothing or hats determined to be gang related or inappropriate. Districts might consider adopting policy language that goes beyond “allowing” and instead “promotes” or “encourages” students to wear sun-protective clothing. In addition, students might be advised to keep a long-sleeved garment or “play shirt” at school.

Sunglasses are not specifically mentioned in the law and there are differing opinions as to whether they would be included in the definition of “sun-protective clothing.” Districts may choose to specifically address sunglasses

in policy in order to encourage students to wear them outdoors to protect their eyes from UV radiation.

Sunscreen and lip balm

Education Code 35183.5 requires that students be allowed to use sunscreen during the school day without a physician's note or prescription. As with sun-protective clothing, districts could go beyond the law by “encouraging” rather than “allowing” the use of sunscreen.

School staff should not be required to assist with application of sunscreen, but might be encouraged to remind students to apply sunscreen before going outside for a period of prolonged exposure to the sun (ideally 15-20 minutes before going outside in accordance with California Department of Health Services recommendations for maximum protection).

Lip balm also provides protection against UV radiation and might be specifically authorized in board policy.

School environment

School grounds, especially playgrounds and eating areas, should be evaluated to determine whether additional shaded areas (trees and/or shade structures) are needed. Plans for new construction should include sufficient shaded areas and/or indoor areas to provide protection for students.

Curriculum

Districts can help increase students' knowledge of the risks associated with overexposure to UV radiation and methods that can be used to prevent overexposure. Sun safety should be incorporated into the comprehensive health education curriculum, physical education curriculum, and other subjects as appropriate. Schools should also be encouraged to include sun safety-related presentations and activities in school assemblies or special events.

Modification of activities based on UV Index

If possible, the district may assign someone to monitor the UV Index and, depending on the level of UV exposure indicated by the UV Index, may modify the timing of outdoor activities and/or implement other recommended precautions as needed.

Modeling appropriate behavior

Staff should be encouraged, for their own health and to set an example for students, to model sun-safe practices by seeking shade, applying sunscreen, and wearing hats and other sun-protective clothing while outdoors.

Parental notification

To help schools implement the sun safety program, the district or school should notify parents about the actions being taken to help protect students. This notification might include an explanation of state law pertaining to sunscreen and sun-protective clothing and encourage parents to provide these items for their children to use at school and school-sponsored outdoor activities. Parents also might be provided with information about the risks of overexposure to the sun and sun safety measures to help them protect their children during nonschool hours.

If schools decide to provide sunscreen, parents should be asked to inform school staff if they object to its use for any reason.

Resources

CSBA

www.csba.org/ps.

American Association for Health Education

Serves health educators and other health professionals.
www.aahperd.org/aahe.

American Cancer Society

Information on prevention, early detection and treatment of skin cancer.
www.cancer.org.

American School Health Association

A multidisciplinary organization whose mission is to protect and promote the health and well-being of children and youth through coordinated school health programs.
www.ashaweb.org.

California Department of Education, Health Program

Promotes a coordinated approach to school health through the support of families, schools and communities working together.
www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he and the CDE's Health Framework for California Public Schools: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve.

California Department of Health Services, Skin Cancer Prevention Program

Provides information on the effects of overexposure to the sun and comprehensive education and policy resources on sun safety, including, but not limited to, school systems: The Importance of Promoting and Providing Sun Protection and California Early Childhood Sun Protection Curriculum.
www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/cdic/cpns/skin.

California State PTA

Has adopted a resolution on Sun Safety: Skin Cancer Prevention Measures at School.
www.capta.org.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Cancer Prevention and Control

Resources include Guidelines for School Programs to Prevent Skin Cancer, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Vol. 51, No. RR-4, April 26, 2002, and Shade Planning for America's Schools.
www.cdc.gov/cancer/ncspep.

National Association of State Boards of Education

Provides sample policy to promote sun safety and prevent skin cancer through the Fit, Healthy and Ready to Learn project.
www.nasbe.org/HealthySchools/sun_safety.html.

National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention

Shares the resources and research of its member organizations to maximize the impact of skin cancer prevention programs and funding.
www.skincancerprevention.org.

National Safety Council, Environmental Health Center

Provides fact sheets and educational outreach programs on sun safety to parents, teachers and others.
www.nsc.org/ehc/sunSAFE.htm.

Sun Safety for Kids

A nonprofit corporation affiliated with the Los Angeles Metropolitan Dermatological Society. Provides information, tips, and resources to help school administrators develop a comprehensive sun safety program for their schools. Addresses program administration, curriculum, environmental support, sunscreen, clothing and sunglasses, and more.
www.sunSAFEforkids.org.

**SunSmart, The Cancer Council Victoria
(Australia)**

Internationally recognized skin cancer prevention campaign.
www.sunsmart.com/au.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Includes a school component in its Sunwise Program to teach sun-safe behaviors to schoolchildren.
www.epa.gov/sunwise.

UV Index

Daily forecast of the expected intensity of UV radiation from the sun. Searchable by zip code or city.
www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html.

World Health Organization (WHO)

Provides information on sun protection in schools and an educational package, Sun Protection and Schools: How to Make a Difference, to protect children from UV radiation.
www.who.int/peh-uv.