



he risk of skin cancer begins with a child's first exposure to sunlight. The sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation damages the skin, eyes, and immune system,<sup>1</sup> and the effects are cumulative. Although light-skinned people are the most susceptible to skin cancer, *everyone* is vulnerable and should be vigilant about sun safety.

Sun protection should begin at birth, since establishing healthy routines in childhood can foster positive lifelong preventive habits.<sup>2</sup> Sun safety is especially important for young people because multiple sunburns (in fact, just *one* blistering sunburn) during childhood and adolescence more than double the risk of melanoma in the future.<sup>3</sup>

## FOR STUDENTS

The World Health Organization (WHO) notes, "UV radiation exposure during the school years contributes significantly to total lifetime sun exposure."<sup>1</sup> During a child's typical weekday, six to nine hours are spent at school. Sunlight is most intense between 10 AM and 4 PM, when students are often outdoors for recess and other school or after-school activities. Many school grounds lack the adequately shaded areas needed to limit UV exposure.

Shade can be provided by solid roof structures, gazebos, awnings, shade cloth, and natural shade, such as thickly leaved trees.<sup>4</sup> However, these partial shade of priority)," an article in *Health Education Research* advises.<sup>5</sup> Teachers, coaches, and staff should model sun protection behaviors during outdoor activities. Rescheduling these activities to avoid midday exposure is also especially important, since some schools prohibit wearing caps, hats, and

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methods still allow some UV exposure (even on gray days, since UV rays pass through clouds, rain, and fog), so more sun protection strategies are needed. Children must be instructed to "protect themselves when outdoors by using shade, clothing, hats and sunscreen (in that order sunglasses on school property due to the association with gang activities and/or drug use.<sup>6</sup>

## FOR SCHOOLS

Professional development for school staff should address sun safety policies,

## PROMOTING SUN SAFETY AT SCHOOL<sup>8</sup>

## Parents

- Apply sunscreen to children's exposed skin before school, and
- provide sunscreen for reapplication later in the day.
- Provide sunscreen for outdoor school field trips.
- Remind children to be sun-safe when outdoors.
- Work with the principals, teachers, PTA, and school board to support district-wide sun protection policies.

## **Teachers and School Personnel**

- Integrate sun safety lessons into appropriate academic areas.
- Be a "sun-safe" role model for students.
- Remind students to practice sun protection behaviors.
- Educate parents and community members about sun
- protection behaviors.

## **Principals**

- Promote sun safety to students, school personnel, and community members.
- Work with parents and community members to develop a sun safety policy and curricula for students and staff.

## **School Superintendents and Board Members**

- Approve sun safety in-service training for teachers and staff, and classroom sun safety education for students.
- Implement a district-wide sun safety policy.
- Provide outdoor shade for playgrounds and athletic areas.

## **Community Health Care Providers**

- Regularly discuss sun safety with young patients and parents.
- Begin sun safety education at birth before mother and baby leave the hospital. (Infants should not be exposed to the sun in their first six months.)
- Educate teachers, staff, administrators, and school board members about sun safety.
- Help develop sun safety policies in school districts.



**From top:** Shade structures covering playground equipment; shade trees at school.

practices, and teaching strategies.<sup>1</sup> Teachers can take advantage of the many free, age-appropriate sun protection curricula or lessons. K-8 classroom materials are available through the SunWise School Program (www.epa.gov/sunwise), as are lessons from the Sun Safety Activity Guide (www.nsc.org). For grades K-12, the Melanoma Foundation (www.melanomafoundation.com) offers SunSmart America, and the Shade Foundation (www.shadefoundation.org) provides the Sun Safe School Guide. The Skin Cancer Foundation also has free materials for teachers and students in grades 5-8 at www.SkinCancer.org/school.

Many US school districts lack written sun safety policies. This plus misunderstanding and lack of knowledge of UV radiation risks contributes to children's poor sun protection practices.<sup>7</sup> Certain existing policies define sunscreen as "medicine," require parental/ medical permission for its application, or prohibit teachers/aides from applying it to children.<sup>6</sup> A revised sun protection policy might recommend that parents 1) include sunscreen in students' supply kits; and 2) sign permission slips allowing their children to apply sunscreen before going outside. Permission slips would be kept in the students' permanent school health records.<sup>6</sup>

Suggestions for creating a policy, as well as a sample policy, are available at www.sunsafetyforkids.org/schoolpolicy/.

## FOR COMMUNITIES

Community members, businesses, and organizations can assist in sun protection efforts by 1) serving on school sun safety committees; 2) donating money to buy trees/shrubs and shade structures; 3) planting trees or installing shade structures on school grounds; and 4) making sunscreen available for school/ recreation use. Additionally, in some states, grassroots advocacy is needed to pass laws allowing the legal distribution of sunscreen and the use of hats in schools and community recreation programs.

It behooves all adults to become positive role models who practice and promote sun protection behaviors.<sup>2</sup> School personnel and parents can be instrumental in establishing these lifelong healthy behaviors.

For more information, go to www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/pdf/ sunsafety\_v0908.pdf ■

DR. YOUNG is an Associate Professor in the Department of Health and Exercise Sciences at Truman State University, Kirksville, MO. BRENDA GOODWIN is an Instructor in the Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation at Missouri State University, Springfield, MO.

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