Dear Principals and School Council Presidents,

Skin cancer is an important health issue for all young Victorians and effective prevention is key to reducing the risk of skin cancer. Skin cancer is one of the most preventable cancers, and adolescence and childhood are critical periods during which exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is more likely to contribute to skin cancer in later life. Schools play an important role in instilling effective UV protection behaviours from an early age.

Children generally leave primary school with well-established sun protection practices, however these practices appear to diminish in adolescence. Without appropriate strategies in secondary school these behaviours, which have been part of daily life at primary school, are quickly forgotten.

Victorian government schools are guided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s School Policy and Advisory Guide *Sun and UV Protection* policy. Keeping UV protection on the agenda at a strategic level is essential for promoting change and reinforcing UV protection behaviours. We invite you to review your policy implementation and discuss how to maximise UV protection at your next school council meeting. A facilitation paper to guide discussion at the council meeting is enclosed. Suggested topics to discuss include:

- **Joining the Healthy Together Achievement Program** – We encourage you to access support to integrate UV protection strategies in school planning through the Victorian Government’s Healthy Together Achievement Program. The Achievement Program supports schools to create healthy environments for learning and will be launched in secondary schools in early 2014.

- **Planning for shade** - Adolescents are generally resistant to traditional interventions for skin cancer prevention (such as wearing hats). Results of the 2011 National SunSmart Schools Program Survey indicate that Australian adolescents’ compliance with sun protection measures is low, with many reporting that they forgot or poorly applied sunscreen, and consider wearing protective clothing a ‘hassle’ or unfashionable. However, research has shown that adolescents will use shade if it’s available. Providing quality shade in school settings is a key strategy to minimise UV radiation exposure for adolescents. Refer to the enclosed facilitation paper for more information.

Also enclosed in this letter is a sample article for your school newsletter which informs parents of this initiative and your school’s intention to discuss UV protection at school council.

Thank you for your continued commitment to providing safe environments for young Victorians to learn and develop.

Yours sincerely

[Signatures]

The Hon. David Davis, MP  
Minister for Health

The Hon. Martin Dixon, MP  
Minister for Education
Facilitation paper:
school council meeting

This paper is intended to be used as a guide for discussion around improving and maximising UV protection strategies in secondary schools, primarily the provision of shade. The recommended strategies are consistent with and will support your school’s implementation of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development School Policy and Advisory Guide *Sun and UV Protection* policy.

You may wish to focus on selected topics or review all topics to identify areas for improvement.

Consider the actions that your school could implement during high UV periods (September – April). The questions for discussion apply to those months in Victoria when UV is at damaging levels (3 and above), generally from September to the end of April.

**Key areas for improvement:**
There are eight key topic areas for possible improvement of sun protection messages and behaviours:

1. Slip on sun protective clothing
2. Slop on sunscreen
3. Slap on a broad brimmed hat
4. Seek shade
5. Slide on sunglasses
6. Curriculum
7. Policy
8. Additional resources
1. Slip on sun protective clothing

Clothing can be an effective barrier preventing UV from reaching the skin. Fabrics with a UPF (ultraviolet protection factor) rating of 40 or higher can block at least 97.5% of the sun’s UV. A Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into school uniforms and dress codes was conducted in 2007, with final recommendations tabled in December 2007. A full report is available from [http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/etc/inquiries/inquiry/101](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/etc/inquiries/inquiry/101). The Committee found that one of the most direct ways in which dress codes and school uniforms can support student health and wellbeing is through sun protection.

Questions for discussion

1. Does your school have a uniform policy which addresses sun protection requirements?
2. Does the school uniform/sports uniform dress code include loose fitting clothing made from cool, densely woven fabric which covers as much skin as possible?
3. Does the summer uniform/sports uniform dress code include a shirt with at least elbow length sleeves and a collar that sits close to the neck, above the collarbone?
4. Does the summer uniform/sports uniform dress code include longer style skirts/shorts/pants to at least the knee?
5. Are rash vests or t-shirts promoted and used at outdoor swimming events?

Recommendations

- Victorian government schools must adhere with guidance related to school uniforms and dress codes in the Sun and UV Protection policy in the School Policy and Advisory Guide.
- Consider uniforms that cover as much skin as possible.
- Consider including a statement addressing sun protection in dress code or school uniform policies.

Resources

2. Slop on sunscreen

Sunscreen should be used whenever the UV index is 3 and above (generally from September to the end of April). The following questions apply to this time period.

Questions

1. Is SPF 30+ (or higher) broad spectrum, water resistant sunscreen available for students and staff use?
2. Is sunscreen included on the school booklist?
3. Are students encouraged to bring their own sunscreen to school?
4. Do staff encourage fair to olive skinned students to use sunscreen and provide time for students to apply sunscreen before going outside?
5. Are there strategies in place to remind students to apply sunscreen before going outdoors (e.g. reminder notices, sunscreen monitors, PA announcements)?
6. Do yard-duty teachers carry sunscreen with them?
7. Is sunscreen included in the first aid kit and taken on all camps and excursions?

Recommendations

- Victorian government schools must adhere with guidance related to sunscreen in the Sun and UV Protection policy in the School Policy and Advisory Guide.
- Sunscreen should be used on exposed skin through September to the end of April, and any other day that the UV index is 3 or above.
- Sunscreen should be reapplied regularly.
- It is recommended that schools have strategies in place to remind students to apply sunscreen before going outdoors (e.g. reminder notices, sunscreen monitors, PA announcements).

Resources

3. Slap on a broad brimmed hat

Hats, particularly broad brimmed hats, are an important sun protection measure.

Questions

1. Is a broad brimmed hat included on the school uniform list?
2. Are staff and students encouraged to wear broad brimmed hats which protect their face, neck and ears whenever they are outside during the sun protection times?

Recommendations

- Victorian government schools must adhere with guidance related to hats in the Sun and UV Protection policy in the School Policy and Advisory Guide.
- Provide all students with an option or requirement to wear a sun protective hat, as well as appropriate standards relating to sun protective clothing and sunglasses.

Resources

4. Seek shade

Shade is an important sun protection measure with good quality shade reducing overall exposure to UV by 75%.

Questions

1. Is shade provision considered in the initial planning, budget and overall design of new buildings and grounds?
2. Do staff and students have access to sufficient shade (natural, built or portable) in outdoor areas, particularly in those areas where students congregate such as lunch areas, canteen, sports ovals?
3. Is portable/demountable shade available where built shade is insufficient?
4. Has a shade audit been conducted to determine current availability and quality of existing shade and regularly monitored over time?
5. What can be done to increase the use of under-utilised shaded areas?
6. Is it feasible to adjust existing shade or develop further shade (built, portable, or natural)?
7. Is shade considered in the planning of outdoor activities and excursions?

Recommendations

- Victorian government schools must adhere with guidance related to shade in the Sun and UV Protection policy in the School Policy and Advisory Guide.
- Carry out an audit of under-utilised shade and a review of how to better use this shade, as purchasing new shade can incur a substantial cost.
- When purchasing shade, perform an assessment of the site to determine the best shade solution and use a quality shade supplier.
- As schools will likely be bearing the cost of any shade purchases, financial viability will need to be considered.
- Shade should be used in conjunction with other sun protection measures such as hats, sunscreen, protective clothing, and if practical, sunglasses.
- Trees provide a cool and shady alternative to the built environment, but choosing a tree can be difficult. It is best to seek professional advice about your particular site and a tree species that will perform well over many years. Local councils usually have trained horticulturalists or landscape architects on staff who will be able to suggest the best tree for your conditions. Be sure to explain that you want a tree with a generous shade canopy during the period September to April. You may also consider using tree species that don’t cause allergic reactions or carry spiny fruits. Factors that affect a tree’s health include soil type, climate and available water.

Resources

- DEECD School Policy & Advisory Guide - Sun & UV protection
- SunSmart’s online shade audit tool can be used to identify the shade currently available on your school site and any improvements that could be made, available at: http://www.sunsmart.com.au/shade-audit/.
- Top tips for choosing or purchasing portable shade are available at:
5. Slide on sunglasses

Exposure to UV radiation over long periods can lead to serious damage to the eyes. If practical try to protect the eyes all year using sunglasses.

Questions

1. Are staff and students encouraged to wear close fitting, wrap-around sunglasses that meet the Australian Standard 1067 (sunglasses: category 2, 3 or 4) and cover as much of the eye area as possible?

Recommendations

- Victorian government schools must adhere with guidance related to sunglasses in the Sun and UV Protection policy in the School Policy and Advisory Guide.
- Encourage students to wear close fitting, wrap-around sunglasses throughout the year.

Resources

- DEECD School Policy & Advisory Guide - Sun & UV protection
- The SunSmart website includes tips for choosing and using sunglasses well, available at:
- The Australian Standard 1067 can be found at:
6. Curriculum

The school curriculum provides an important opportunity for students to learn more about sun protection, vitamin D and related health messages.

Questions

1. Are sun protection and vitamin D education and related health messages incorporated into one or more key learning areas of the curriculum?
2. Are staff supported to access resources, tools and professional learning to enhance their knowledge and capacity to promote sun protection and vitamin D across the curriculum?

Recommendations

- Victorian government schools must adhere with guidance related to curriculum in the *Sun and UV Protection* policy in the School Policy and Advisory Guide.
- Incorporate sun protection, vitamin D education and related health messages into relevant areas of the curriculum.
- Support staff to access resources, tool and professional learning to enhance their knowledge and capacity to promote sun protection and vitamin D education.

Resources

- Schools can now add the free SunSmart UV Alert widget to their website homepage for staff, students and parents to access. The widget shows the daily weather, temperature and UV level specific to your school's location including details about the times sun protection is required each day. Available at: [http://www.sunsmart.com.au/ultraviolet_radiation/sunsmart_uv_alert/uvwidget.html](http://www.sunsmart.com.au/ultraviolet_radiation/sunsmart_uv_alert/uvwidget.html).
UV/sun protection policies are important ways for schools to ensure staff and students are protected. There are a number of resources available to assist schools to implement such policies and embed them throughout the school community.

Questions

1. Does your school have a current UV/sun protection policy in place from September to April? NB. This is separate to a heat policy.
2. Does your school use the “DEECD School Policy & Advisory Guide - Sun & UV protection”?
3. Are staff encouraged to act as role models by using a combination of sun protection measures (sun protective clothing and hats, sunglasses, sunscreen and shade) when participating in outdoor events and on yard duty?
4. Is sun protection considered in the planning of all outdoor events such as assemblies, camps, excursions and sporting events?
5. Do partner organisations comply with sun protection measures identified in the school sun protection policy at events on and off site?
6. Are students consulted about sun protection and vitamin D initiatives via the student representative council, student action teams, leadership programs or other representative structures?

Recommendations

- Victorian government schools must adhere with guidance related to policy in the Sun and UV Protection policy in the School Policy and Advisory Guide.
- Ensure your school has a current UV/sun protection policy in place that is embedded in different ways across the school.
- Ensure that UV/sun protection is considered as part of the planning of events on and off site.

Resources

- DEECD School Policy & Advisory Guide - Sun & UV protection
- SunSmart can assist with the development or review of a school’s policy and has sample policies available at http://www.sunsmart.com.au/childcare_and_schools/at_school/e12_p12_7-12_schools. SunSmart also provides free professional development for staff looking at the personal risks that staff members face and their duty of care to the students.
8. Additional resources

- Secondary schools can contact the Cancer Council Victoria’s SunSmart program for further support.
- SunSmart has free secondary school specific support available to assist schools including curriculum appropriate teaching materials, sample secondary school UV policies, newsletters, resources, implementation tips and advice – see www.sunsmart.com.au.
- In early 2014 the Healthy Together Achievement Program will be launched in secondary schools. The Achievement Program is a Healthy Together Victoria initiative supporting early childhood services, schools and workplaces to create healthier environments for learning and working. It provides a quality framework and supporting resources for schools to coordinate existing and new activities using a whole-school approach to promote health and improve student engagement and wellbeing. Schools receive step-by-step guidelines, resources, and can be linked with local health professionals, organisations and programs to access additional support. For further information or to join see: http://achievementprogram.healthytogether.vic.gov.au
A modifiable version of this article can be obtained from christine.harvey@health.vic.gov.au

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world, so sun protection is an important issue for everyone, especially children and teenagers. Research shows that too much sun exposure in childhood increases the risk of developing skin cancer later in life.

The Minister for Health and the Minister for Education have written to every primary and secondary school in Victoria to invite school councils to talk about how to improve sun protection measures. School_name will be discussing this at the next school council meeting and are committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for children to learn, play and develop.

Results of the 2011 National SunSmart Schools Program Survey highlighted some key successes in Victoria. For example, 99% of primary schools recommend SunSmart hats, significantly more than other states. But there is room to improve our sunscreen use, shade provision and protective uniforms. We can also start sun protection measures earlier in the year. These are some of the areas that our school council will explore.

We ask that parents contribute to the sun protection message at home. Parents can continue to reinforce good sun protective behaviours on the weekend and during school holidays between September to the end of April, when Victoria’s UV levels are typically at three and above (the level when sun protection is needed). Families can download the free SunSmart app (www.sunsmart.com.au) or check the weather section of your daily newspaper which indicates local sun protection times.

Thank you for your continued support. Together we can play a major role in helping to prevent skin cancer.