

# Keeping sun safe in child care

by Megan Shaw

Australia has the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world. Our climate is extremely harsh and it is vital we protect ourselves from the sun. Children are particularly vulnerable to the sun's ultra violet (UV) rays due to their sensitive skin; however, sun safety should be practiced at all ages.

## Your service's sun safety policy

All children's services should have a sun safety policy and this policy needs to be strictly and consistently implemented to keep all people within the service safe. The policy should be easy to read and cover key areas for sun safety, including:

- Appropriate clothing
- Use of sunscreen
- Use of hats
- Use of shade
- Avoiding times of the day when UV levels are at their peak
- Practicing and role modelling of sun safe behaviour by adults.

## Slip... on a shirt

Your service's policy can include information on appropriate clothing for both children and educators. Clothing that covers the shoulders should be encouraged to provide maximum protection. If your service provides a uniform, consider providing a polo style shirt and avoid singlets or tank tops.

While it can be difficult to control the clothing children wear to the service, it is important to explain the policy to each family upon enrolment and to remind them regularly of the guidelines. If your service is having ongoing difficulty with families not following your policy guidelines you may consider holding an information evening to educate families on the importance of sun safety.

## Slop... on some sunscreen

Using sunscreen is a key aspect of sun safety. The Cancer Council Australia recommends the use of SPF30+ or higher sunscreen. Ensure you follow the manufacturer's instructions with the application of sunscreen, as it needs time to absorb into the skin before it begins to protect.

### This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles:	4.1
OSHCQA Principles:	7.2
QIAS Principles:	6.5

Sunscreen should be reapplied regularly throughout the day when children go outside. Many services have found it helpful to ask families to apply sunscreen to their child upon arrival at the service.

Hygiene also needs to be considered when applying sunscreen as there is a risk of cross contamination between children. Consider allowing children to apply their own sunscreen under supervision or, alternatively, you may consider using separate gloves or a tissue for each application.

## Slap... on a hat

There are certain types of hats that are recommended by Cancer Council Australia. These are hats that protect the ears and neck, such as bucket style or legionnaire's hats. Baseball caps and visors are not recommended as they do not protect the ears or neck. If children bring hats that do not meet your service policy, consider ways to communicate the policy to families. As with appropriate clothing, it may be useful to provide regular reminders to families on the best style of hats for maximum sun protection.

Some services have found it helpful to supply hats themselves, and to either factor the cost into the service's overall budget or give families the option of purchasing a hat if they wish to do so.

## Avoiding peak UV times

The Cancer Council Australia recommends implementing sun safe factors when the UV rating is three and above. In some areas of Australia this means all year round. As the climate varies across the country, the times your service allows outdoor play will vary. In some parts of Australia you can use a guide of no outdoor play between 10am and 2pm. However, during the summer months the UV rating can remain at the level of extreme for most of the day, so it is best to check the rating on a daily

basis. Both the Cancer Council Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology websites contain information on the daily UV rating for every region in Australia. This information can be used as a guide for your service to plan outdoor play each day.

Your service should have shaded areas in which children can play and, wherever possible, experiences should be set up in these areas. This may mean moving experiences throughout the day to follow the shade.

### Role modelling sun safe practice

It is important that all educators follow the service's sun safety policy. This means wearing a hat, sun safe clothing and sunscreen every time you go outside. This is not only to role model for the children, it is also an important Occupational Health and Safety practice.

### Consistency among educators

It is essential that all educators fully understand the service's sun safety policy. To help ensure this, the policy should be written in a clear, concise manner. It should include all of the important information required and outline the educators' role step-by-step.

You may consider including the sun safety policy in your service induction procedure and emphasise the point that all educators must follow the policy at all times. Another way to ensure educators adhere to the policy is to implement regular reviews of the policy at educator meetings.

### Communicating with families

To ensure all families are familiar with your service's sun safety policy you may consider including a summary of the policy in the parent handbook. The full policy should also be made available to families. Information and reminders can also be included in newsletters and poster notices to continue to remind families about sun safe practices.



### Hygiene considerations

As mentioned earlier, there are hygiene factors to consider when applying sunscreen.

The way in which hats are stored also needs to be considered. There are hygiene risks when hats are stored together, so you may consider storing the hats in each child's bag. If the service provides hats you could consider washing the hats on a roster basis. It is important to ensure that children do not share hats.

### Conclusion

Australia's climate is among the harshest in the world and, as a result, we have the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. Over-exposure to UV rays is one of the main causes of skin cancer and this exposure can begin in early and middle childhood. Educators play an important role in protecting children and keeping them safe from the sun, as well as providing them with lifelong sun safe habits ■

### References and further reading

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