

Sun protection in child care – what to expect

Creating a new SunSmart generation is important, and skin cancer is one of the most preventable cancers.

Exposure to too much of the sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation can cause sunburn, skin and eye damage and skin cancer. The UV damage accumulated during childhood and adolescence is strongly associated with an increased risk of skin cancer later in life.

Early childhood education and care services have a duty of care to protect children from any harm including UV.

Are you familiar with the sun protection policy at your child's early childhood education and care service ?

National Regulations require early childhood education and care services to have a sun protection policy (Reg 168 (2)(a)(ii)) including evidence-based guidelines about:

- why the policy is being implemented
- when sun protection is used
- sun protection measures (hats, clothing, sunscreen, shade and, if practical, sunglasses)
- role modelling
- learning about sun protection
- family information

SunSmart have a sample policy which includes current [Cancer Council Australia](#) guidelines and recommendations for each state and territory.

When does the service use sun protection?

UV radiation is invisible energy from the sun and is the main cause of skin cancer. A combination of sun protection measures (hat, clothing, sunscreen, shade and sunglasses) are recommended whenever UV Index levels reach three or above.

Cancer Council Australia's free SunSmart app shows daily UV levels and sun protection times - a forecast from



the Bureau of Meteorology for the time of day UV levels are forecast to reach three or above. Sun protection times are also available in the weather section of the newspaper, at [cancer.org.au](#) and [myuv.com.au](#).

Services can monitor the daily sun protection times and notify staff and families by displaying the times at the entrance, at the sign-in sheet, in rooms or via the SunSmart widget on their website.

As UV can't be seen or felt, it's important to track the UV levels and sun protection times and not be caught out by weather. If the UV is three or above, regardless of the weather, sun protection is needed.

Is there shade in the outdoor play space?

Good quality shade (Reg 114) can reduce overall exposure to the sun's UV. When combined with appropriate clothing, hats and sunscreen, children can be well protected from UV when outdoors. It's important the service has shade in the outdoor space for children to access.

UV reaches us directly from the sun and it can also be scattered by particles in the air and reflected off surfaces such as brick, concrete, glass, sand and water. What does your service's outdoor play space look like? Rough, uneven natural surfaces (e.g. grass, tanbark, soil) reflect less UV than smooth, shiny, light-coloured surfaces.

Shade can be natural (Reg 113) (e.g. trees with broad, low and dense canopies), built (e.g. extended verandahs, pergolas) and temporary (umbrellas, tents, canvas).



Can you see sun protection measures being used?

Educator role modelling of sun protective behaviours is not only important for their own health but also encourages and motivates children to follow their lead. Actions can often be more powerful than words so an educator applying sunscreen or grabbing their hat can have a big influence on children's behaviours. This is also true for parents - when parents use sun protection such as hats, shade, sunscreen, and clothing, their children are more likely to use these sun protection methods too.

During the sun protection times (whenever the UV level is three or above), ensure staff and children use these 5 sun protection measures for outdoor play and activities.

- 1 **SLIP** on clothing that covers as much skin as possible.

If you can see skin, UV can reach it. Does your child's service encourage appropriate sun protective clothing recommendations such as tops that cover the torso with higher necklines and three-quarter length sleeves, longer style shorts and dresses/skirts that at least reach the knee?

- 2 **SLOP** on sunscreen.

The widespread use of sunscreen on babies under six months is not generally recommended.

Sunscreen ingredients work in two ways, either scattering and/or absorbing UV to stop it reaching the skin. Because sunscreen helps prevent UV from reaching the skin, it helps prevent DNA damage which leads to skin cancer.

Your child's service may supply SPF30 (or higher) broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen or ask families to provide this. For any parts of skin not covered with clothing, sunscreen is best applied about 20 minutes before going outside and reapplied every two hours or more often if it has been wiped or washed off.

Services often have a sunscreen application permission form for families to sign. It is also helpful if families apply a generous application of sunscreen at drop-off and indicate this on the sign-in list. This helps educators ensure there has been a good base layer applied and children are ready to play outside.

From about three years of age, educators are encouraged to provide opportunities for children to learn how to apply their own sunscreen (under supervision) so children can develop independent skills ready for school. The service may have a sunscreen station just inside the door with a mirror, pump pack of sunscreen and a cloth for wiping hands.

- 3 **SLAP** on a hat that shades the face, neck and ears such as a wide-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire hat. Caps and visors do not provide enough protection and are not recommended.

It is helpful if the service has hat storage that children can easily access so they know which hat is theirs and where to grab it from before they go outside. It's important to teach children that hat wearing is a part of the outdoor routine.

- 4 **SEEK** shade.

- 5 **SLIDE** on a wrap-around sunglasses (labelled AS1067).

Even if your child's service doesn't include sunglasses as part of their policy, their eyes will still be protected by wearing a sun protective hat.

For further information on sun protection, head to cancer.org.au or call on 13 11 20. Should you need information in another language, call 13 14 50 and ask to be connected to Cancer Council in your language.

(This article has been contributed to by Cancer Council Australia, a recognised not-for-profit organisation which aims to promote cancer-control policies and to reduce the illness caused by cancer in Australia.)