



Media Release

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Victorian primary schools are the best in Australia at sun protection

School children in Victoria have the best sun protection in Australia, with the latest survey revealing the State's schools have a high standard of sun protection in comparison to other states.

SunSmart Manager, Jen Makin, said: "90% of Victorian primary schools now participate in the SunSmart program, which is higher than any of the other states. The majority of primary schools surveyed (89%) reported having a written sun protection policy and 85% said that sun protection was incorporated into the curriculum at all year levels."

"We are delighted with the incredible progress that has been made here in Victoria since the SunSmart schools program first began over 18 years ago, given that schools play such an integral role in the reduction of future skin cancer rates."

"However, there is still room for improvement with Victorian schools less likely than other states to report having enough shade for both active and passive activities. This is worrying given that children attend schools during times of peak ultraviolet radiation (UV) levels.

"We know that UV exposure during childhood is a significant determinant of lifetime risk of skin cancer but good quality shade (natural or made-made) offers up to 75% protection from UV making it an effective sun protection strategy."

Encouragingly, schools are aware of the importance of shade, with approximately 3 in 4 Victorian schools indicating they had increased their level of shade in the last three years, and approximately half reporting an intention to increase shade in the following three years.

"We are pleased to see this commitment to increasing shade at school. Particularly as we know from Victorian research, that students will use - not avoid - shade if it is made available at their schools. In fact, we know that potentially up to one third of students could be better protected from UV exposure over spring and summer months by a school installing shade."

SunSmart recommends that schools kick start the new year by conducting a shade audit to assess the quantity and quality of shade within their own school environment.

"Overall, findings suggest that Victorian schools have a high standard of both sun protection policy and practice. Victoria is a world leader in sun protection, largely due to the long term commitment to the SunSmart program by Cancer Council Victoria and VicHealth."

"But there is still work to do, particularly when it comes to creating a supportive environment. This includes creating effective shade but also the use of student assemblies and whole school activities to encourage sun protection."





Other facts and statistics

- A higher proportion of Victorian schools are registered SunSmart members compared to other states (82% compared with 43% in other states among schools that participated in the survey).
- The majority of primary schools had a written sun protection policy (89%), and of these schools, the majority continually enforced their policy (87%) and found it easy to maintain (85%).
- The majority of Victorian primary schools recommended SunSmart hats only (broad-brimmed, legionnaire and/or bucket hats only) (99%), required teachers to wear hats (87%) and reported that more than 75% of students would be wearing a hat when outdoors on a typical school day in March (99%).
- An increase in the proportion of Victorian primary schools including both shirts with collars (79% in 2005 cf. 87% in 2011) and shirts with elbow length sleeves (25% 2005 cf. 41% 2011) in their uniform compared with earlier years.
- Victorian primary schools were also more likely to include sun protection education in all year levels (85% cf. 78% in other states), to provide parents with sun protection information (72% cf. 62%), to use the SunSmart UV Alert (15% cf. 8%) and include shirts with elbow length sleeves (41% cf. 29%) in their uniform than primary schools in other states.

The SunSmart schools program aims to:

- Ensure that all children and staff maintain a healthy UV exposure balance, reducing their risk of skin cancer while getting enough sun for vitamin D.
- Encourage children and staff to use a combination of sun protection measures (hats, clothing, sunscreen, shade and, if practical, sunglasses) during the daily sun protection times (whenever UV Index levels reach 3 and above) from September to April.
- Encourage children and staff to put sun protection away for May to August, when UV levels in Victoria are mostly below 3.
- Work towards a safe outdoor environment that provides shade for children and staff at appropriate times.
- Assist children to be responsible for their own sun protection.

The SunSmart shade audit can be used to assist schools, childcare centres, preschools, community groups and local government to ensure adequate, quality shade is provided in their parks, playgrounds and public open spaces. Find out more at sunsmart.com.au/shading-audit/intro