

Recommendation for inclusion of a wide-brimmed hat in primary school uniform guidance

The HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) and Healthy Ireland are encouraging schools across the country to remind children, parents and teachers of the importance of protecting skin when outside in the sun. Spending time outdoors is good for all of us. However, it is important to protect our skin when out in the sun by following the SunSmart 5 S's.

Did you know?

Children are particularly vulnerable to the skin-damaging effects of Ultraviolet (UV) radiation, so it is important to protect their skin when outside in the sun.

UV exposure during the first 10–15 years of life makes a disproportionately large contribution to lifetime risk of skin cancer¹.

Research has shown levels of self-reported childhood sunburn in Ireland are high with nearly 90% of 10- to 17-year-olds said they have experienced sunburn in their lifetime².

While sunscreen use amongst children in Ireland is reasonably high, half of school children do not wear a hat or clothing that covers arms and legs when in the sun².

Wearing a wide-brimmed hat that protects the face, neck and ears is one of the simplest and most effective ways to do this. The purpose of this communication from the HSE's NCCP and Healthy Ireland is to provide information for schools on the potential benefits of the inclusion of a wide-brimmed hat in the primary school uniform.

Which type of hat?

- The neck, ears, lips, face and nose are common sites of skin damage and skin cancer as they are constantly exposed to the elements and therefore, generally receive more UV radiation exposure than other parts of the body.
- Wide-brimmed hats, including bucket and legionnaire style hats, provide protection for all of these areas. Baseball style hats are not recommended, as these styles do not provide adequate coverage to protect the ears, cheeks or neck.

¹ Cancer Institute New South Wales. NSW Skin Cancer Prevention Strategy 2012-15. New South Wales; 2012

² McAvoy, H., Rodriguez, L., Költő, A and NicGabhainn, S. (2020). Children's exposures to ultraviolet radiation - a risk profile for future skin cancers in Ireland. Institute of Public Health in Ireland. <https://publichealth.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20200616-Childrensexposure-to-UV-report-final.pdf>



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Other considerations

- Some fabrics give better UV protection from the sun than others. The weave and composition of the material is important, use fabric that is tightly woven. Synthetic fabrics often have a tighter weave, but natural fabrics such as cotton can also be tightly woven and are comfortable to wear.
- Dark clothes block more UV rays than light-coloured clothes.
- An Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) label indicates how much UV radiation (both UVB and UVA) a fabric allows to reach the skin. Clothes labelled with a UPF of at least 40 block UV radiation from passing through so a UPF of 40 or higher is recommended. However, not all clothing sold in Ireland carries a UPF label. If a hat with a UPF rating is not available, choosing a wide-brimmed, dark coloured hat made from tightly woven fabric will still ensure good protection.

Wide-brimmed hats should always be used in combination with other forms of sun protection such as clothing, shade and sunscreen (see Addendum for the 5 S's of skin protection).

Rationale for inclusion in school uniform guidance

The UV index tells you how strong the sun's UV rays are each day. You need to protect your skin when the UV index is 3 or above. In Ireland, the UV index is usually 3 or above from April to September, even when it is cloudy. UV is usually strongest between 11am and 3pm

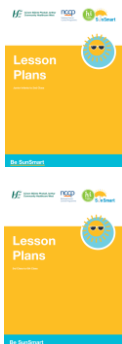
Children spend half of their childhood at school and about 8 hours per week while travelling to and from school, on lunch breaks, and participating in outdoor school-based activities. Much of this time falls between the hours of 11am and 3pm, when the sun is at its highest and UV rays are strongest, increasing the risk of skin damage.

Including wide-brimmed hats in a uniform policy is an important step which schools can take to protect children. In addition to reducing their exposure to damaging UV radiation this measure has the potential to:

- reinforce the importance of sun protection from a young age
- encourage and support children to develop independent sun protection skills
- provide learning opportunities for children, staff and families on sun protection

Resources to help teachers, parents and guardians to protect children and young people from overexposure to UV radiation

The HSE's NCCP has developed SunSmart lesson plans and activity sheets for SPHE (Safety and Protection). These provide teachers with ideas and materials to support the integration of sun protection education and behaviours into the classroom. Hard copies of the resources are available to order by emailing prevention@cancercontrol.ie or can be downloaded here:



[SunSmart Primary School Lesson Plans for Junior Infants to Second Class](#)

[SunSmart Primary School Lesson Plans for Third Class to Sixth Class](#)

The Get SunSmart! Children's Art Competition is back! The HSE's NCCP in collaboration with Healthy Ireland are calling on all primary school children, depending on their age category, to either colour-in our SunSmart images or draw their own picture showing how to be SunSmart! Prizes are available for each age category. For more info: www.gov.ie/getsunsmart

**Get SunSmart!
Children's Art Competition**

Prizes: Overall winners will have their artwork featured as part of the 2025 SunSmart Campaign and also win an OPW Family Heritage Card, a Family Day Pass to Dublin Zoo and a National Book Token

Runner up prizes also up for grabs

More info at www.gov.ie/getsunsmart

Closing date extended to 9th May 2025

New SunSmart School Toolkit for Primary Schools Resource - this resource is coming soon and provides your school with information resources and supports to become a SunSmart School. By completing some simple steps your school could be accredited by the HSE's NCCP as a SunSmart School. To receive information on when this resource is available email prevention@cancercontrol.ie

To order SunSmart posters for your school, visit www.healthpromotion.ie and choose 'cancer' on the drop-down menu. For more information email prevention@cancercontrol.ie or visit www.hse.ie/sunsmart



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Addendum

The easiest way to protect children's skin from UV radiation is to follow the SunSmart 5 S's especially from April to September:

Follow the SunSmart 5 S's to reduce your risk of skin cancer



Slip on clothing that covers
your skin



Slop on sunscreen on exposed
areas using factor 30+ for adults
and 50+ for children



Slap on a wide-brimmed hat



Seek shade – especially if outdoors
between 11am and 3pm



Slide on sunglasses

Do not deliberately try to get a suntan.
Avoid getting a sunburn. Never use a sunbed.

Be SunSmart
www.hse.ie/sunsmart



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