

WHO INFORMATION SERIES ON SCHOOL HEALTH DOCUMENT SEVEN

Sun Protection: An Essential Element of Health-Promoting Schools

The development of this document is a joint effort of the Department of Noncommunicable Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and the Department of Protection of the Human Environment.

This document is jointly published with UNESCO, Division for the Promotion of Quality Education, which is working with WHO to promote health through schools worldwide.

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*This document is dedicated
to the memory of*

Herbert Loeb Friedman

*who contributed
significantly to the health
and development of
adolescents*

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Table of Contents

Foreword.....	7
1. Introduction.....	9
1.1 Why did WHO prepare this document?.....	9
1.2 Who should read this document?.....	9
1.3 What is ultraviolet (UV) radiation?.....	10
1.4 What are the health effects of UV exposure?.....	10
1.5 Why increase efforts to improve sun protection?.....	11
1.6 What are the essential elements of sun protection?.....	11
1.7 Why are children a target group?	12
1.8 How will this document help people promote health?.....	12
1.9 How should this document be used?	12
2. Convincing others that sun protection in schools is important.....	13
2.1 Argument: UV exposure during the school years contributes significantly to total lifetime exposure.....	13
2.2 Argument: Schools are vitally important settings through which to promote education about UV radiation and providing sun protection.....	13
2.3 Argument: Sensible sun exposure behaviour contributes to decreasing the risks of some of today's leading health problems.....	14
2.4 Argument: Preventive health habits developed at a young age are likely to continue into adulthood.....	14
2.5 Argument: School children are especially susceptible to fashion trends suggesting that a suntan is healthy.	15
2.6 Argument: Reducing sun exposure enables healthy adulthood and ageing.	15
2.7 Argument: Investing in sun protection interventions decreases costs in the health system and strengthens the economy.	15
2.8 Argument: With ongoing ozone depletion, UV levels on earth are likely to rise and people will experience more harmful UV exposure.	16
3. Convincing others that sun protection in schools will really work.....	16
3.1 Argument: We can improve health and well-being through sun protection in schools.	16
3.2 Argument: Schools can provide interventions to improve sun protection in ways that are highly cost effective.....	17
3.3 Argument: Sun protection education for girls has a positive impact on the health of families...	17
3.4 Argument: Sun protection interventions in schools benefit the entire community.....	17

4.	Planning the interventions	18
4.1	School and community involvement in planning	18
4.2	Situation analysis	19
4.3	Commitment and policies	21
4.4	Goals and objectives of sun protection interventions in schools	23
5.	Integrating sun protection within various components of Health-Promoting schools	25
5.1	Skills based school health education	25
5.2	Healthy school environment	30
5.3	School health services	32
5.4	Community and family involvement and outreach	32
5.5	Physical exercise, recreation, and sports	35
5.6	Health promotion for school staff	36
6.	Evaluation	36
6.1	Ongoing evaluation	37
6.2	Types of evaluation	37
6.3	What and how to evaluate	37
6.4	Reporting progress and achievements	39
	ANNEX 1: Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986)	40
	ANNEX 2: Appropriate Use of Sunscreen	43
	ANNEX 3: Simple Activities to Educate Children and Their Families About Sun Protection	44
	ANNEX 4: Example of a School Sun Protection Policy	45
	ANNEX 5: Examples of Ways in Which Sun Protection Can Be Integrated into Curriculum Areas Other than Health	46
	ANNEX 6: Teaching Strategies for Sun Protection Education	48
	REFERENCES	49

Foreword

Investments in schools are intended to yield benefits to communities, nations and individuals. Such benefits include improved social and economic development, increased productivity and enhanced quality of life. In many parts of the world, such investments are not achieving their full potential, despite increased enrolments and hard work by committed teachers and administrators. This document describes how the results of educational investments can be enhanced, by increasing the capacity of schools to promote health as they do learning.

For better or worse, health influences education. If children are healthy, they can take full advantage of every opportunity to learn. But, children who cannot attend school because of poor health or unhealthy conditions cannot seize the opportunities that schools provide. Similarly, schools cannot achieve their full potential if children who attend school are not capable of learning well. Poor health and unhealthy conditions jeopardize the value of school attendance. But education can also help promote healthy attitudes and behaviour, through carefully designed school health programmes. In this respect, health is not only a condition required for teaching and learning, but also an outcome of quality education. School health must therefore be a key element in efforts to achieve Education for All (EFA), and health must be high on the agenda of the education sector at all levels.

Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun is of considerable public health concern, and plays an important role in the development of skin cancer and cataracts, and suppresses the immune system. Children are particularly at risk as (i) sun exposure during childhood appears to set the stage for the development of skin cancer, (ii) a majority of a person's lifetime exposure occurs before age 18, and (iii) because children have more time to develop diseases with long latency, more years of life to be lost and more suffering to be endured as a result of impaired health. Prevention efforts in schools to change children's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour regarding sun protection can significantly decrease adverse health effects and health care costs.

This document is part of the WHO Information Series on School Health prepared for WHO's Global School Health Initiative. The Initiative is a concerted effort by international organizations to help schools improve the health of students, staff, parents and community members. Although definitions will vary, depending on need and circumstances, a Health-Promoting School can be characterized as a school constantly strengthening its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working.

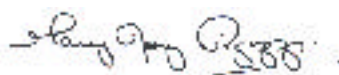
The extent to which each nation's schools become Health-Promoting Schools will play a significant role in determining whether the next generation is educated and healthy. Education and health support and enhance each other. Neither is possible alone.



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Health-Promoting School

A Health-Promoting School:

- Fosters health and learning with all the measures at its disposal
- Engages health and education officials, teachers, students, parents and community leaders in efforts to promote health
- Strives to provide a healthy environment, school health education, and school health services along with school/community projects and outreach, health promotion programmes for staff, nutrition and food safety programmes, opportunities for physical education and recreation, and programmes for counseling, social support and mental health promotion
- Implements policies, practices and other measures that respect an individual's self-esteem, provide multiple opportunities for success, and acknowledge good efforts and intentions as well as personal achievements
- Strives to improve the health of school personnel, families and community members as well as students; and works with community leaders to help them understand how the community contributes to health and education

FRESH Initiative

At the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, April 2000, WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank launched an initiative to work together to Focus Resources on Effective School Health (FRESH Initiative). In doing so, they are helping schools provide a living and learning environment that is friendly and welcoming to children, healthy for children, effective with children, and protective of children.

Education and health agencies are encouraged to use this document in support of the FRESH Initiative by implementing school health policies, improvements in the school environment, skills based health education and school health services to reduce exposure of students, school personnel, families and community members to the harmful effects of the sun.

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