

# The Cancer Council Victoria's Secondary School Sun Protection program

To the principal/school council,

Cancer Council research shows that adolescents have low rates of sun protective behaviour and high preference for a tan.

This is very concerning considering that adolescence and childhood are critical periods during which sun exposure is likely to contribute to skin cancer later in life.

While the vast majority of primary schools in Victoria are members of the SunSmart School Program, this Program has not been as successful in the secondary sector.

Consequently, in 2007, The Cancer Council Victoria developed a more *achievable* and *realistic* policy, in consultation with the sector, especially for secondary school communities.

Joining the program is very easy. All you have to do is:

**1. Adopt and implement The Cancer Council Victoria's sun protection policy**

The policy template (page x) includes elements SunSmart considers essential to be an effective sun protection policy for secondary school communities. SunSmart encourages secondary schools to adopt this policy by simply ticking the boxes that correspond with each policy item.

Schools may adapt the policy if they wish as long as all the key elements are covered.

**2. Sign the secondary school sun protection program membership and agreement form on page x.**

**3. Send/fax a photocopy of your school's sun protection policy and the signed agreement to:**

The Cancer Council Victoria's Secondary School Sun Protection Program 100 Drummond St, CARLTON VIC 3053 Fax: 03 9635 5260 Ph: 03 9635 5148
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There are many benefits to joining the program such as access to free resources and regular updates and information from the Cancer Council Victoria.

In the interests of the future health of your students and staff, we encourage all secondary schools to join this program.

Yours sincerely,

Professor David Hill, TCCV  
Todd Harper, VicHealth  
WorkSafe  
CEO  
AISV  
DET

## The Cancer Council Victoria's secondary school sun protection policy template

School name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Rationale

Too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun causes sunburn; skin and eye damage and increases the risk of developing skin cancer. Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Adolescence and childhood are critical periods during which sun exposure is likely to contribute to skin cancer later in life.<sup>2,3,4</sup> It is estimated that more than 75% of all skin cancers could be prevented by practising sun protection in childhood and adolescence.<sup>5</sup>

This policy has been developed as part of our commitment to a safe school environment, to reduce the risk to students and staff of exposure to UV radiation from the sun.

### Objectives

The objectives of this sun protection policy are to:

- Increase student and whole-school awareness of skin cancer and other damage caused by exposure to UV radiation
- Work towards a safe school environment that provides shade and other sun protective measures for the entire school community
- Encourage the entire school community to use a combination of sun protection measures whenever UV Index levels reach 3 and above
- Ensure that families and new staff are informed of the school's sun protection policy

### Implementation

Strategies 1-4 (clothing, sunscreen, scheduling, role modelling) will be implemented from the beginning of September until the end of April, as this is when UV Index levels are high enough (3 and above) to damage the skin and lead to skin cancer.

Strategies 5-7 (shade, curriculum, professional development for staff) are ongoing and will therefore be implemented at various times throughout the year.

#### 1. Clothing

Sun protective clothing is included in our school uniform / dress code and sports uniform in the following ways.

Note: As a minimum standard, **at least 3** of the following items must be included in your policy. It is anticipated that schools will work towards achieving all of these standards over time.

- (i) The summer uniform/dress code includes a shirt with at least elbow length sleeves and a collar that sits close to the neck, above the collarbone.
- (ii) The summer uniform/dress code includes longer style skirts/shorts/pants at least to the knee.
- (iii) The sport uniform/dress code includes a shirt that covers the shoulders well and collar that sits close to the neck, above the collarbone.

- (iv) Students and staff are required to wear hats that protect their face, neck and ears, (i.e. broad-brimmed or bucket hats) whenever they are outside. During sports classes, baseball caps are worn where a broad brimmed or bucket hat may be impractical.
- (v) The sport uniform/dress code includes longer style skirts /shorts/pants at least to the mid-thigh.
- (vi) Rash vests or T-shirts are compulsory for outdoor swimming, when students are waiting to compete.
- (vii) Students and staff are encouraged to wear close fitting, wrap around sunglasses that meet the Australian Standard 1067 (Sunglasses: Category 2, 3 or 4) and cover as much of the eye area as possible.

## **2. Sunscreen**

SPF 30+ broad spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen is available for staff and students' use and students are encouraged to bring their own sunscreen to school.

Staff encourage students to use sunscreen and provide time for students to provide sunscreen before going outside.

The school community is educated about the correct use of sunscreen and the level of protection it provides.

## **3. Scheduling**

This policy is considered in the planning of all outdoor events such as assemblies, camps, excursions and sporting events.

Where possible, outdoor activities/events will be scheduled earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon, or indoor venues will be considered.

## **4. Role Modelling**

Staff are encouraged to act as role models by using a combination of sun protection measures (sun protective clothing and hats, sunglasses, sunscreen and shade) when outside.

Families and visitors are encouraged to use a combination of sun protection measures (sun protective clothing and hats, sunglasses, sunscreen and shade) when participating in and attending outdoor school activities.

## **5. Shade**

The school council/board ensures shade is available in the school grounds particularly in areas where students congregate – for example, lunch areas, canteen, outdoor lesson areas.

The school council/board ensures shade provision is considered in plans for future buildings and grounds.

Processes for the planning of outdoor activities and excursions include the consideration of shade.

Students are encouraged to use shade when outside particularly if they are not wearing appropriate hats or clothing.

## **6. Curriculum**

Sun protection and educational programs are incorporated into appropriate areas of the secondary school curriculum.

Students are encouraged to be involved in initiatives to promote and model sun protection measures to the whole school community.

Sun protective behaviour is regularly reinforced and promoted to the whole school community through a variety of channels such as newsletters, staff meetings and school assemblies.

### **7. Professional development for staff**

Sun protection is included in staff training to enable staff to work safely outdoors and to encourage them to be positive role models.

Sun protection information is included in staff booklets.

New staff are given a copy of this policy.

### **Review of policy**

The school council, staff and SRC regularly monitor and review the effectiveness of the sun protection policy (at least every three years) and revise the policy when required.

Next policy review: .....

Name of person/position with ultimate responsibility for reviewing policy:  
.....

### **References**

1. Calculated by M. Staples from data contained in National Cancer Control Initiative. *The 2002 national non-melanoma skin cancer survey. A report by the NCCI Non-melanoma Skin Cancer Working Group. Edited by M. P. Staples* Melbourne: NCCI, 2003.
2. Armstrong BK. How sun exposure causes skin cancer: an epidemiological perspective. In: Hill D, Elwood JM, English DR, eds. *Prevention of Skin Cancer*. Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004, pp. 89-116.
3. Whiteman DC, Whiteman CA, Green AC. Childhood sun exposure as a risk factor for melanoma: a systematic review of epidemiologic studies. *Cancer Causes & Control* 2001; 12: 69-82.
4. Khlat M, Vail A, Parkin M, Green A. Mortality from melanoma in migrants to Australia: variation by age at arrival and duration of stay. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 1992; 135: 1103-1113.
5. Stern RS, Weinstein MC, Baker SG. Risk reduction for non melanoma skin cancer with childhood sunscreen use. *Archives of Dermatology* 1986; 122: 537-545.



**Please send or fax this signed agreement form, together with a copy of your school's sun protection policy.**

**To: The Cancer Council Victoria's Secondary School Sun Protection Program  
100 Drummond St, CARLTON VIC 3053 Fax: 03 9635 5260**

## **Explanatory notes**

### **1. Clothing**

This section contains information about sun-protective clothing, hats and sunglasses.

#### **Clothing**

##### **Rationale for sun-protective clothing**

Well-designed, sun protective clothing offers students effective and reliable protection from the sun's UV rays.

Sun protective clothing is particularly important for PE/sport classes and events, as they are often held outdoors for long periods when UV radiation is most intense. Victorian students are most at risk during all day outdoor sporting carnivals held between September and April.

##### **Recommendation**

SunSmart recommends that the school's uniform/dress code policy (including sports uniform) include sun protective clothing. The most important thing to consider is the *style or design* of the clothing. For best protection, the clothing should cover as much of the students' skin as possible.

##### **Examples:**

##### **Summer uniform/dress code**

- A shirt with at least elbow-length sleeves (although  $\frac{3}{4}$  length sleeves provide better protection from the sun).
- Collar that sits close to the neck, above the collarbone. Scoop necks, v-necks or any other necklines below the collarbone are not recommended.
- Longer style skirts/shorts/pants at least to the knee (although  $\frac{3}{4}$  length shorts/pants provide better protection from the sun).

##### **Sports uniform/dress code**

**Note:** *The need for sun protection must be balanced with the practicalities of playing sport, and we have tried to reflect this in the following recommendations:*

- A shirt that covers the shoulders well. Tanks tops are not recommended.
- Collar that sits close to the neck, above the collarbone. Scoop necks, v-necks or any other necklines below the collarbone are not recommended.
- Longer style skirts/shorts/pants at least to the mid-thigh (although knee-length skirts/shorts/pants provide better protection from the sun).
- Rash vests or t-shirts for outdoor swimming.

##### **Further information about clothing**

Apart from style/design, there are other factors that determine how effective garments are at reducing UV radiation.

- UPF (ultraviolet protective factor)

Clothes especially designed for sun protection will carry a UPF (Ultraviolet Protection Factor) level on their tags. The higher the number, the greater the protection from UV radiation.

The UPF rating doesn't refer to the design of the garment, just its material. Any fabric rated above UPF 30 provides good protection against UV radiation, but UPF 50+ is recommended.

Fabrics that don't carry a UPF rating don't necessarily offer less protection than those that have not been tested, but the rating system provides added assurance.

UPF rating	% UV radiation absorbed	Protection category
10	90.0	moderate
15	93.3	good
20	95.0	good
30	96.7	very good
40	97.5	excellent
50	98.0	excellent

(Source: Australian Radiation Protection And Nuclear Safety Agency 2003)

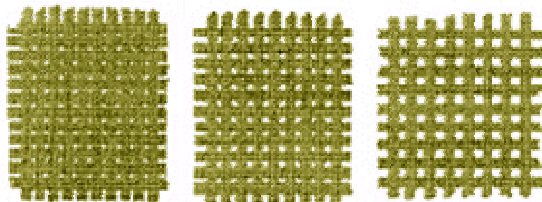
- **Composition**

Different fabrics absorb different amounts of UV radiation. Most cotton or cotton/polyester blend fabrics provide protection equal to about UPF 20 (which is about 95% protection from UV radiation).

Keeping cool is also important. Fabrics are now available that are lightweight and cool, yet still provide maximum sun protection. In the heat it is important that garments draw perspiration away from the body to help the body stay cool.

- **Weave density**

The closer the fabric's weave, the higher the UV radiation protection. Because the fibres of tightly woven fabrics are closer together, less UV radiation is able to pass through to the skin.



**High UPF   Moderate UPF   Low UPF**

(Source: Australian Radiation Protection And Nuclear Safety Agency website)

Loose fitting clothes give better protection than close-fitting clothes and may be more comfortable to wear on hot days.

- **Colour**

Darker colours (black, navy, dark red) of the same fabric type will absorb more UV radiation than lighter pastel shades. They will therefore have a higher UPF rating.

## **Hats**

### **Rationale for hat-wearing**

Common sites of skin damage and skin cancer are the neck, ears, temples, lips, face and nose. These areas are constantly exposed to the sun and generally receive more UV radiation than other body parts. Wearing an appropriate hat is one way to protect these sensitive areas.

Many secondary schools have experienced difficulties with enforcing hat wearing, mainly due to student (and sometimes staff) resistance. In some schools, the sun protection policy has failed or has been abandoned due to the challenges presented by encouraging adolescents to wear sun-protective hats. In other schools, so much effort is spent trying to encourage students to comply with the hat-wearing component of the policy that other important parts of the policy (eg structural/environmental strategies like shade) are overlooked.

Other schools have succeeded in making hat-wearing an accepted part of school life. In these schools, there is often a commitment from senior management and staff to make the policy work and clear school 'rules' about uniform, that students are expected to follow.

This policy has been developed to take into account the ethos and culture of individual secondary schools. In policy point 1 (clothing), schools can elect to introduce hats, or focus on ensuring other components of the school uniform are sun-protective. Schools may prefer to initially focus on sun-protective clothing and once the sun protection policy has become established and accepted, attempt to introduce hats.

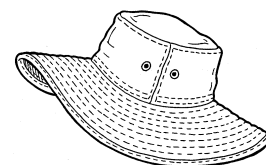
### **Recommendation**

SunSmart recommends hats that provide good shade to the face, back of the neck, eyes and ears when in the sun. Research shows that broad-brimmed, bucket and legionnaire hats provide satisfactory UV radiation protection.<sup>6</sup>

Baseball caps offer little protection to the head and face and are therefore not recommended as a school hat. However, schools may allow baseball caps for sports/PE classes where a broad-brimmed or bucket hat may be impractical.

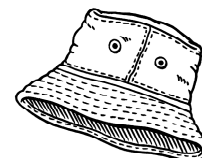
#### ***Broad brimmed hat***

A broad-brimmed hat that provides good shade can considerably reduce UV radiation exposure to the face. Brims should be at least 7.5 cm wide.



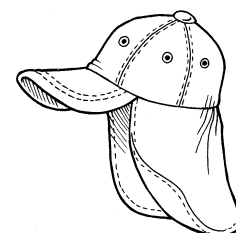
#### ***Bucket hat***

Bucket or surfie style hats should have a deep crown and sit low on the head. The angled brim should be at least 6 cm and provide the face, neck and ears with plenty of shade.



#### ***Legionnaire hat***

Legionnaire-style hats should have a flap that covers the neck. The side flap and front peak should meet to provide protection to the side of the face.



### **What has worked well in secondary schools**

- “Ensure there are consequences for students if they fail to wear a hat. At our school, if students don’t wear a hat they spend lunchtime watching educational DVDS on skin cancer.” *Mick Walsh, Assistant Principal, Kyabram Secondary College*
- “The staff on yard duty carry UV meters. If they notice a student is not wearing a hat, they show the student the UV meter and ask the student to sit in the shade. If a student is told to sit in the shade twice during one week, there are consequences.” *Ian Martin, Principal, Murtoa Secondary College*
- “At Rushworth P-12 College, a SunSmart hat is compulsory for all students. Students can bring a broad brimmed or bucket hat from home as long as it meets the SunSmart recommendations as to brim width. These recommendations are published in the school newsletter. The element of choice has meant that students can express their individuality and choose hats that they enjoying wearing – a couple of students wear sombreros!” *Jeanette Wallace, Assistant Principal, Rushworth P-12 College*

### **Sunglasses**

#### **Rationale for wearing sunglasses**

Exposure the eyes to too much UV radiation can cause skin cancer of the eyelids and around the eyes as well as serious conditions such as cataracts and solar keratopathy (cloudiness of the cornea). Sunglasses which meet Australian Standard AS 1067 and a broad-brimmed hat can reduce UV radiation exposure to the eyes by up to 98%.<sup>7</sup> Even wearing a hat with a brim that shades the eyes can reduce UV radiation to the eyes by 50%.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Recommendation**

Schools need to make their own decision about whether to introduce sunglasses, by weighing up the health benefits with the practicalities and cost of introducing sunglasses. SunSmart suggests, where practical, wearing close fitting, wrap around sunglasses that cover as much of the eye as possible. The sunglasses should meet Australian Standard 1067 (Sunglasses: Category 2, 3 or 4) and preferably be marked EPF (Eye Protection Factor) 10.

### **What has worked well in secondary schools**

- Include Loretto Mandeville quote.

## 2. Sunscreen

### Rationale for sunscreen use

Sunscreen 'screens' out UV radiation from the sun but does not completely block it out. Some UV radiation still reaches the skin. In laboratory conditions SPF 30+ filters around 97% of UV radiation. However, many Australians apply too little sunscreen. This means they usually get less than half the protection stated on the product label.<sup>9</sup> Applying sunscreen should never be the only method of sun protection nor should it be used to stay out in the sun longer.

### Recommendation

The Cancer Council Victoria recommends the use of SPF 30+ broad-spectrum water-resistant sunscreen. It should be applied to skin that can't be covered by clothing.

For best protection, sunscreen needs to be applied at least 20 minutes before going outdoors, to give it time to bind to the skin, and reapplied every two hours if outside for long periods. It is particularly important that students are reminded to reapply sunscreen during all day sporting events.

If the school supplies sunscreen, we recommend that you inform families of the brand/type. Some students may be sensitive to some sunscreens, so families may wish to supply an alternative for their child. Even if all families are asked to provide SPF 30+ broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen, the school should still have a supply available.

### What has worked well in secondary schools

- "At school swimming events, one teacher is assigned to 'sunscreen duty' and another teacher has responsibility for ensuring that students are wearing their hats." *Jeanette Wallace, Assistant Principal, Rushworth P-12 College*
- Include SPF 30+ broad-spectrum water-resistant sunscreen on the booklist so that each student brings their own supply approved by their family.
- Provide sunscreen at various points around the school eg at the canteen, reception, at the sports centre.

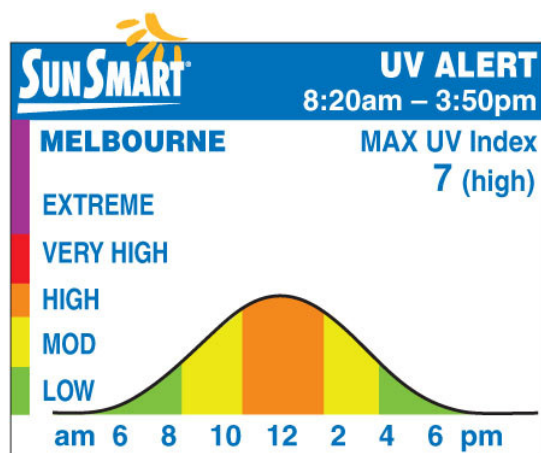
### 3. Scheduling

#### Rationale for rescheduling some activities

In Victoria, UV radiation levels are most intense from the start of September until the end of April. Particular care should be taken between 10 am and 2 pm (11 am and 3 pm daylight saving time) when UV radiation Index levels reach their peak. At least 60% of the day's UV radiation occurs between these times and skin burns faster during these hours. Sunburn can occur in as little as 15 minutes on a fine January day.<sup>10</sup> We therefore recommend that schools try to schedule outdoor activities and events outside these 'danger' hours if possible.

The SunSmart UV Alert is a useful tool to use when planning outdoor events. Issued by the Bureau of Meteorology when the UV Index is forecast to reach 3 (moderate) and above, it also displays the time period when you need to use sun protection. For example, in the Alert below, the time period when you need to use sun protection is from 8.20 am-3.50 pm. As you can see from the graph, The UV Index level is highest between 10.30am and 1.30. The SunSmart UV Alert is reported in most daily newspapers and is available on the Bureau of Meteorology website. Visit [www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv](http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv) .

You can also access the real time UV reading for any capital city in Australia. Visit: <http://www.arpana.gov.au/uvindex/realtime/ausrealtime.htm>.



#### Recommendation

SunSmart recommends that schools schedule their outdoor activities/events earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon, where possible, or consider using indoor venues.

#### What has worked well in secondary schools

- “The school receptionist cuts and pastes the SunSmart UV Alert from the Bureau of Meteorology website ([www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv](http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv)) to our daily student bulletin every morning. So every student is told what the UV Index level is for the day and when sun protection is required.” Jackie Mowat, School Nurse, Neerim District Secondary College.
- Consider holding a couple of twilight carnivals, to replace an all day sporting event. As well as protecting your students from UV radiation, parents could also attend these events.

## **4. Role modelling**

### **Rationale for role modelling by staff and parents**

Research shows that active role modelling by sport coaches and other adults has a positive influence on youth sun protection.<sup>11,12</sup> Secondary students are quick to pick up on hypocrisy, so it is important that staff 'walk the talk' when it comes to the school's sun protection policy.

### **Recommendation**

Encourage staff to act as role models by using a combination of sun protection measures when outside from September to April. For example, during staff meetings remind teachers of their responsibility to be good role models.

Remind families and visitors to the school to also use a combination of sun protection measures when participating in and attending school activities. Reminders could be included in the school newsletter.

### **What has worked well in secondary schools**

- "Carey provide teachers with sun-protective hats at the start of the year." *James Brown, Head of Senior School, Carey Baptist Grammar School*
- Encourage teachers to keep any receipts for sun protective products eg hats, sunglasses and sunscreen. They can claim these items back on tax!

## 5. Shade

### Rationale for providing shade

Well-designed shade not only provides pleasant surroundings to relax in, but also provides shelter from the sun's UV radiation at the right time of day and the right time of year.

Providing shade is a particularly good strategy for secondary schools as using shade seems to be a suitable and acceptable option for adolescents, without compromising their sense of identity or fashion!

### Recommendation

The Cancer Council Victoria strongly recommends that schools provide well-designed shade in the school grounds. We recommend that schools conduct a shade audit to find out how much shade the school already has and where students gather during peak UV radiation times.

It is also important for the school council/board to advocate for shade when new buildings are being planned. Due to budgetary constraints, shade is often overlooked in the planning process.

The best types of shade have extensive overhead or side cover and are away from highly reflective surfaces such as concrete. The shaded area should also be an inviting space so students will want to use it.

Although shade is a very effective form of sun protection, it will not totally block out all of the sun's UV rays. Indirect UV radiation can scatter in the atmosphere and reflect from surfaces such as water, sand and concrete. Maximum UV protection can be achieved by using shade in conjunction with sun protective clothing, hats and sunscreen.

### What has worked well in secondary schools

- Contact the Cancer Council Victoria's SunSmart Program for information and free resources on shade planning and design
- A useful tool for planning shade is WebShade. Visit the website at [www.webshade.com.au](http://www.webshade.com.au).

## 6. Curriculum

### Rationale for incorporating skin cancer education and sun protection messages into the curriculum

Educating students about sun protection and skin cancer helps to reinforce the school's sun protection policy and engage students in the messages. Students will gain a greater understanding of the need to protect themselves from UV radiation.

### Recommendation

We recommend that sun protection and educational programs are incorporated into appropriate areas of the school curriculum such as Health, Physical Education and Personal Development. SunSmart advertising campaigns can also be a focus of Media Studies and English.

There is no need for teachers to develop their own resources. Easy-to-use curriculum resources are available from The Cancer Council Victoria's SunSmart Program. Posters and information sheets are also available, and can be ordered on-line.

It is important that sun protection measures are regularly reinforced and promoted to the whole school community – for example, through assemblies, staff meetings and newsletters etc. Asking senior students to present a SunSmart information session to younger students can be very effective.

SunSmart has developed a PowerPoint presentation for secondary school students, which teachers can deliver at a school assembly. A *60 Minutes* segment (DVD) which focuses on young people's experience of skin cancer, is also available. Visit the website at [www.sunsmart.com.au/](http://www.sunsmart.com.au/) or contact SunSmart on (03) 9635 5148.

### What has worked well in secondary schools

- “Billanook lost a former student, Emily Tapp, to melanoma. Emily's mum, Louise White, and Emily's best friend, Ricci Thompson, spoke to the students at assembly about skin cancer and the importance of sun protection. This emotional assembly was a very powerful way to get the message across to both students and staff.” *A.B Ross, Principal, Billanook College*
- “Every year, our year 9 students prepare a SunSmart education page of the school website. This is a great way to educate not only the year 9 students, but the entire school community. Visit <http://www.charlton.vic.edu.au/cc/index.htm> *Jenny Ritchie, SunSmart co-ordinator, Charlton College.*

## 7. Professional development for staff

### Rationale for providing PD to staff on skin cancer/sun protection

To enable staff to work safely outdoors and to encourage them to be good role models, it is important that they are given the opportunity to learn more about skin cancer and sun protection. Health messages sometimes change in response to research and it is important that staff are kept up-to-date.

Under Occupational Health and Safety Legislation, schools should provide a safe work environment, which includes the use of protective measures to reduce skin damage. The legislation also states that employees must cooperate with their workplace sun protection program. In other words, if the employer provides hats and sunscreen, the employee must wear them.

### Recommendation

We recommend that sun protection is included in staff training, at least once every three years and/or as part of new staff induction training. This could take many forms, for example:

- A Workplace Education session delivered by a trained educator. This has a cost associated with it. For more information, visit [www.sunsmart.com.au](http://www.sunsmart.com.au)
- A PD session that a staff member could deliver to the rest of the staff, using SunSmart resources.
- Training and/or information as part of the staff induction program

### What has worked well in secondary schools

- “I was invited by the principal to deliver a SunSmart information session to staff. To prepare the presentation, I got on the SunSmart website and read up on the five key sun protection messages. There was great interest from staff, and lots of questions, mainly about correct sunscreen use. To follow up, I downloaded the sunscreen information sheet from the SunSmart website and photocopied it for all teachers.” *Lauren O’Toole, PE Teacher, Billanook College.*

### References

1. Calculated by M. Staples from data contained in National Cancer Control Initiative. *The 2002 national non-melanoma skin cancer survey. A report by the NCCI Non-melanoma Skin Cancer Working Group. Edited by M. P. Staples* Melbourne: NCCI, 2003.
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6. Gies P, Javorniczky J, Roy CR, Henderson S, Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA). Measurements of the UVR protection provided by hats used at school. *Photochemistry and Photobiology* 2006; 82: 750-754.
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10. Roy CR, Gies P. Ozone depletion and its calculation effect on solar UVB radiation levels for some Australian cities. *Health Effects of Ozone Layer Depletion, Report of the NHMRC* 1989.
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12. Olson AL, Gaffney C, Starr P, Gibson JJ, Cole BF, Dietrich AJ. SunSafe in the Middle School Years: a community-wide intervention to change early-adolescent sun protection. *Pediatrics* 2007; 119: e247-256.