

Prevention of Skin Cancer in Young People

Is your school fulfilling their duty of care when it comes to Sun Safety??

The rising incidence of skin cancer in the UK is a major public health issue. Over the last 25 years, rates of melanoma (the most deadly form of the disease) have risen faster than any of the major cancers and, are set to continue if action is not taken. There are now an average of 7 deaths per day from skin cancer in the UK and the tragedy is two-fold; rates of melanoma are disproportionately high in young people (aged 15-34) and yet skin cancer is one of the few cancers that is almost entirely preventable with sufficient education, so lives do not have to be lost!

SunSafe School Award - helping your school stay sun safe!

The SunSafe Schools award scheme has been developed by national skin cancer charity, Skcin (The Karen Clifford Skin Cancer Charity) and will be launched mid to end of April 2012. Established in 2006, the charity's primary objective is to significantly raise awareness of the UK's most common and fastest rising cancer, with a focus on prevention and early detection.

Skcin are co-ordinators of Skin Cancer UK, a collaborative group that in May 2011 presented an in-depth report to the government campaigning for cultural and educational change with regard to the ticking time bomb that is skin cancer in the UK. Skcin firmly believe that education is the key to establishing the necessary culture change to combat the soaring rates of skin cancer. It is critical the seeds of sun safety are planted not just at home, but in the classroom where promotion of the sun safe message and practical applications, such as the provision of hats, sun screen and, where possible, shaded areas should be part of a schools duty of care to ensure the health and well-being of it's pupils.

Too much exposure to ultraviolet light (UV) radiation from the sun causes sunburn, skin damage and increases the risk of skin cancer. Sun exposure in the first 18 years of life contributes significantly to the lifetime risk of skin cancer, as any damage done is cumulative. Therefore, there is enormous potential for schools to help prevent skin cancer in future generations. Schools really are central to protecting children's skin this is because:

- Children are at school five out of seven days a week during hours when UV levels can be at their highest.
- Most damage due to over exposure to the sun occurs during the school years.
- Schools can play a significant role in changing behaviour through role modeling and education.
- Children and teachers are at risk of sunburn within 10-15 minutes of being exposed to strong sunlight.
- Children spend an average of 1.5 hours outside per school day, more if involved in sports and other outdoor activities.

- Skin cancer is largely preventable through behaviour modification and sun protection during early years.

But what about Vitamin D??

Much has recently been made in the media about vitamin D deficiencies and rickets coming back in children. There is undoubtedly a need to have some unprotected exposure to sunlight, which helps the body produce Vitamin D. Skcin believe the key is everything in moderation and follows experts who say that 15 to 20 minutes of unprotected sun exposure, even outside the hours of 11am to 3pm when UV levels are at their highest, should be sufficient to produce the required vitamin D levels. The critical point is not to burn/start to turn red, as sunburn caused by too much exposure to the sun is damaging to your skin and can lead to skin cancers. Children should enjoy the sun and being outdoors, but just be aware of the risk as enjoy safely.

SunSafe Schools resource makes policy implementation simple!

The SunSafe Schools website (www.sunsafeschools.co.uk) and associated content and resources have been developed by Skcin to assist schools in their duty to enforce a suitable sun safe policy and teachings within their environment. Specifically designed to be simple, effective and realistic, the site provides schools with a step-by-step guide to gaining the status of a SunSafe School with a host of engaging resources for both key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils. All teaching resources have been written by experienced primary school teachers and tie in with the national curriculum. Further resources have been designed to provide fun, engaging and interesting ways for pupils to learn, including a downloadable book about a character that becomes a 'sunsafe superstar'!

Skcin believe, together we have a responsibility to ensure that our children grow up with sufficient knowledge of sun safety and that primary school children are adequately protected against the sun's harmful rays during school hours. The SunSafe School scheme is particularly focused towards primary schools where early impact on attitudes and behavior towards sun safety can be affected. Implementing a SunSafe policy will ensure that your school is adequately equipped to protect the children in your care from over-exposure to UV and illustrate to parents that you are prepared to go that extra mile to ensure the health and wellbeing of the pupils in your care.

As school governors you can play a pivotal role in helping to reduce the alarming rates of skin cancer in your school with a suitable sun safe policy and by planting the seeds of cultural and behavioural change in the classroom.

For more information on the Sun Safe Schools Award Scheme contact:

Charlotte Fionda – charlotte.fionda@skcin.org, 07834 450671, or access the Sunsafe Schools website www.sunsafeschools.co.uk available from end April 2012, or alternatively visiting the main charity website at www.skcin.org

(We would encourage Governing Bodies to consider the implications of this article in the context of their own school and for the well-being of children and staff in it. There are clearly further implications for those who spend much time in the open air, sportspeople, gardeners, walkers etc alike. Ed)