

Sun protection measures for early learning centres.

It wouldn't surprise most Australians to hear that, according to the Cancer Council, Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. And sadly, most skin cancers in Australia are caused by exposure to UV radiation in sunlight. We all know that we can and should protect ourselves from over-exposure to UV radiation to reduce the likelihood of skin cancer. However, many would admit that we could at times do better at this.

One of the challenges for educators and managers working in early learning centres is to be sure they don't just focus on the health and safety of the children but also themselves and their colleagues. All businesses have an obligation to provide a safe workplace for all staff and early learning centres are no different. This means that when early learning centres develop their sun protection policies, they need to consider the staff as well as the children. And further to this, when staff are enforcing the policy, they need to ensure they're enforcing it for all staff.

Your obligations

Approved providers must, according to the Education and Care Services National Regulations, have policies and procedures in place relating to sun protection (Regulation 168). And they must take reasonable steps to ensure those policies and procedures are followed (Regulation 170). The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) provide guidelines on creating these and other policies and procedures.

The Cancer Council has a SunSmart program which offers a range of tools and advice for how to meet your regulatory requirements of protecting yourself and others from the sun's damaging rays. You can find this by going to cancer.org.au

Tips for sun safety

When putting practices in place to protect your staff and children from sun damage, it's important to incorporate a range of protection measures.

- > SunSmart promote 5 simple steps which most of us would be aware of – Slip, Slop, Slap, Seek and Slide. Staff should be encouraged to follow all steps and reminded that no step is enough on its own.
- > **Slip on clothing** refers to covering skin with clothing as a barrier to block out the sun's UV. For best protection, encourage staff to wear clothes which cover a lot of skin, in darker fabrics and aren't too thin.
- > **Slop on sunscreen** is about regular application of sunscreen. Staff should be made aware that no sunscreen blocks 100% of UV radiation and it shouldn't be relied upon on its own. SunSmart advises that when the UV is 3 and above, sunscreen with an SPF30 or higher should be used and it should be applied 20 minutes before going outside.

> **Slap on a hat** refers to protecting the skin on the face, neck and ears by wearing a hat, preferably one which has a tight weave and is broad brimmed.

> **Seek shade** is a great way of getting people away from UV rays and into cooler locations. Shade at an early learning centre can be natural, such as trees, or it can be built or portable structures such as shade sails or pergolas.

> **Slide on sunglasses** to protect eyes from damage. It's important to understand the level of UV protection with sunglasses as this can vary and not all provide the recommended level of protection.

> Educate staff to raise awareness and understanding of what they should be doing to protect themselves when outside and why. It's more likely they'll follow processes if they understand the reason for them. Unfortunately, there are still many myths surrounding sun protection and damage, such as sunburn on windy days doesn't damage the skin, which means some people aren't protecting themselves as well as they should. Again, the Cancer Council has a great deal of educational information and resources to assist with this.

> UV radiation can't be seen or felt and this can lead to people underestimating its strength and their need to put protective measures in place. However, SunSmart have developed a free app (called SunSmart Global UV) to address this. It takes data from the Bureau of Meteorology and provides a real-time UV index (a number between 1-11) as well as guidance on when sun protection measures are needed. Staff at early learning centres are encouraged to

access this data regularly and make this index available to all staff. One way to do this is posting it up in the staff room each day or alternatively a sign could be placed on a door as a reminder for staff as they're heading outside.

> Centres should consider what they can do to make it easier for staff to do the right thing, such as:

> Make sunscreen available in easily accessible places for staff, so they don't need to search for it when needed.

> Purchase hats for staff to leave at the centre so they don't need to remember to bring one to work each day.

> Keep washable spare hats in the centre.

> Staff should be adhering to sun safety measures to protect themselves and reduce their risk of skin cancer.

However, there are other benefits to this behaviour. Staff should understand that their behaviours in front of children is role modelling behaviour to those children, even if not directly interacting with them. If we want children to grow up with embedded safe practices regarding sun protection, they need to see this behaviour regularly in the adults around them.

> As mentioned earlier, all centres are required to have policies and procedures regarding sun protection. However, having a policy isn't enough – it needs to be adhered to. And one of the best ways to make sure this happens is to not only train staff on the policies and procedures but to regularly discuss them. This could be a topic at staff meetings, particularly in the lead up to warmer months. You can also have conversations with staff during summer to check-in regarding how they're going with complying.



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