

Media Release
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Schools audited on sun protection as country warms up

A survey of 500 schools is being carried out across the country to check how well they protect their pupils from sunburn.

A public health researcher with the Cancer Society Social and Behavioural Research Unit at the Dunedin School of Medicine, Jan Jopson, told the Public Health Association conference today that the survey was being carried out four years after the Cancer Society's National SunSmart Schools Accreditation Programme was launched.

"When we carried out a baseline study in 2005, just before the programme was launched, not a single school of the 242 surveyed met all 12 programme criteria," Ms Jopson told the delegates.

"Just 4 percent met 10 or 11 of the criteria with most - 69 percent - meeting seven or less."

The criteria included things like school policies and practices relating to hats and other clothing, curriculum content, role modelling, environmental shade and rescheduling of outdoor activities to times when solar ultraviolet radiation levels are less high.

Director of the research unit, Dr Tony Reeder, told the public health delegates in Dunedin that among the most difficult criteria for schools to meet was the wearing of suitably sun protective hats and other clothing.

"Despite it being a key component of adequate protection, only 44 percent of schools required pupils to wear suitable hats. For some schools it was important that children were out playing and they didn't want to put conditions on that. But it is important for schools to be 'sun smart'. Children who get sunburned have a greater risk of developing melanoma later in life, than those who don't."

"Children are at school for the majority of daylight hours, including the peak sunburn time of 12 to 2pm. Schools have a responsibility to protect them at school, educate about risk and provide a good example to the wider community.

Ms Jopson said schools primarily need to be concerned about sun protection in Terms 1 and 4 when the damaging ultra violet light was at its most intense.

However, the researchers are very pleased that schools appear to be taking the SunSmart message much more seriously.

"The Cancer Society's SunSmart Schools Accreditation programme has already more than 300 schools registered with it, which have received

accreditation as SunSmart schools because they meet all 12 SunSmart criteria," Ms Jopson said.

On-site visits relating to the survey will be carried out in Term 1 next year.

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