

Sample sun protection policy on outdoor play for Early Learning Centres



Background

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland with around 13,000 cases diagnosed annually and the National Cancer Registry Ireland (NCRI) has estimated that between 2015-2045 the incidence of skin cancer will almost double¹. Ultraviolet radiation (UV) from the sun and artificial sources (e.g. sunbeds) is the main risk factor for the development of skin cancer².

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to skin damage from UV. UV is emitted from the sun and artificial sources such as sunbeds. Childhood sunburn, unprotected sun exposure and use of sunbeds increase the risk of developing skin cancers later in life. Severe sunburn during childhood (three or more instances before age 20) is associated with two to four times higher risk of developing melanoma skin cancer in later life³. Yet, the “*Children’s exposure to ultraviolet radiation – a risk profile for future skin cancers in Ireland*” report found that nearly 90% of 10 to 17-year olds said they have experienced sunburn in their lifetime⁴.

A person's natural skin colour influences their sensitivity to UV and skin cancer risk, and can be classified on a scale – the Fitzpatrick skin type classification scale, which ranges from 1 (high risk) to 6 (low risk). It considers skin colour (i.e. pale white to black), and how the skin reacts to sunlight (i.e. whether it burns easily, or tans). Most people living in Ireland have fair skin – Fitzpatrick skin type 1 or 2. People with these skin types burn easily and tan poorly so are particularly vulnerable to UV damage, and as a result, are at a higher risk of skin cancer. Even though the incidence of skin cancer is lower in dark-skinned people, they are nevertheless susceptible to the damaging effects of UV radiation and should also protect their skin.

The National Skin Cancer Prevention Plan aims to increase awareness and adoption of skin cancer prevention behaviours with a focus on targeting high risk groups including children and young people. Playing and spending time outdoors is such an important part of childhood but it is crucial that children are protected and safe in the sun.

Developing a SunSmart policy in your Early Learning Centre (ELC) can help to provide a safe environment to protect children and staff from unprotected exposure to the sun's UV rays and will help reduce the risk of developing skin cancer. A sample SunSmart policy for your use is provided below.

The sample SunSmart policy is intended as a guide only. ELC's can use this sample policy as a model when developing their own SunSmart policy and make amendments that suit their needs and practicalities.

Sample SunSmart policy

Name of Early Learning Centre

SunSmart policy

Rationale

Unprotected exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UV) in childhood is a major risk factor for developing skin cancer later in life. UV is emitted from the sun and artificial sources such as sunbeds.

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to UV damage from the sun. Young children's skin has lower concentrations of the protective skin pigment melanin. The outer layer of children's skin is also thinner than those of adults. This allows UV radiation to penetrate more deeply through the layers of the skin. ELC's offer the ideal setting for educational and behavioural interventions and can play a significant role toward reducing the lifetime risk of skin cancer for children and staff.

Aim of policy

This policy aims to ensure that all children and staff attending the ELC are protected from skin damage caused by harmful overexposure to UV radiation from the sun. The policy outlines how to provide an environment that supports sun protection behaviours, engaging with the Healthy Ireland SunSmart Steps to reduce skin cancer risk (Figure 1).

-  **Slip on clothing that covers your skin, long sleeves, collared t-shirts**
-  **Slop on sunscreen on exposed areas using factor 50+ for children**
-  **Slap on a wide-brimmed hat**
-  **Seek shade - especially if outdoors between 11 am and 3 pm**
-  **Slide on sunglasses to protect your eyes**

Be SunSmart   

Figure 1 Healthy Ireland SunSmart Steps

Objectives

This SunSmart policy has been developed to:

- Encourage children and staff to use a combination of sun protection measures especially between April to September.
- Work towards more SunSmart outdoor environments that provides shade for children and staff at appropriate times in line with the *Universal Design Guidelines for Early Care Settings*.⁵
- Ensuring sun protection measures are promoted and utilised.
- Encouraging and supporting children to develop independent sun protection skills.
- Providing learning opportunities for children, staff and families on sun protection.

Sun protection actions

• UV index

- Staff are encouraged to plan activities to make sun protection part of the daily routine. This is especially important from April to September between 11am – 3pm when UV rays are at their strongest, even on cloudy days.
- You can see sunlight and feel the sun’s heat. But you cannot see or feel the sun’s UV rays. UV can reach you directly from the sun. The UV index measures the strength of the sun’s UV rays so that you know how and when to protect your skin when outdoors. The higher the UV index, the higher the risk of skin and eye damage. When the UV index is 3 or above, you need to protect your skin and eyes. Check the UV index on the Met Eireann website at www.met.ie/uv-index

LOW	NO PROTECTION REQUIRED
1-2	Unless outdoors for extended periods, or near reflective surfaces such as snow or water.
MODERATE	PROTECTION REQUIRED
3-5	Slip on clothing. Slip on sunscreen, use sun protection factor (SPF) 30 for adults and 50 for children. Slap on a wide brimmed hat.
HIGH	Seek shade during midday hours.
6-7	Slide on sunglasses, wraparound are best.
VERY HIGH	EXTRA PROTECTION REQUIRED
8-10	Avoid being outside during midday hours. Make sure you seek shade.
EXTREME	Always wear sunscreen and protective clothing i.e. shirt, hat, and sunglasses.
11+	

- **Clothing**

- Staff to request parents/carers to provide sun protective clothing for children and ensure children use these to protect skin.
- Clothing should cover as much of the skin as possible with comfortable loose-fitting outfits that cover their arms and legs e.g. tops with longer sleeves, collared t-shirts, clothes made from close-woven material that does not allow sunlight through.
- A hat to protect the face, ears and neck when outside such as a wide-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire style hat. Baseball or peak caps are not considered a suitable alternative as they do not provide adequate sun protection to the face, ears and neck.
- Children’s eyes can be protected from UV rays with sunglasses. Parents/carers are requested to supply sunglasses that are wrap around and/or are close fitting. Where possible, staff will encourage children to wear them during outdoor play.

- **Shade**

- An assessment of existing shade is conducted regularly to review the quality and availability of shade.
- The availability of shade should be considered when planning day trips and all activities outdoors.
- Staff are encouraged to consider available areas of shade when scheduling outdoor activities, or to take ‘shade breaks’ during play when the sun’s UV rays are strongest, typically between 11am-3pm from April to September.
- Staff and children are encouraged to use available areas of shade when outside.

- **Sunscreen**

- Parents/carers of children to be informed about use of broad-spectrum (protection against UVA/UVB) sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 50+ for children which has high UVA protection and is water resistant.
- Parents/carers to be advised to apply sunscreen on their child before attending the facility and to provide the child with sunscreen for the staff to reapply during the day between April to September.
- Staff to apply sunscreen to children 20 minutes before going outdoors to all exposed areas of skin if provided by parent/carer.
- Sunscreen to be provided for use by staff members (broad spectrum sunscreen with a minimum of SPF 30+).
- Sunscreen should be stored in a cool, dry place and the expiry date monitored.
- Ensure parents/carers notify the ELC in writing if their child is allergic to sunscreen, and they should supply an alternative sunscreen clearly labelled with the child's name.

Babies and children under 1 year

- Parents/carers to be advised for children up to 1 year old, it is best to keep them out of direct sunlight. For example, by providing shade when they are outdoors and wearing protective clothing and hats.
- Staff to ensure children under the age of 1 play in shaded areas or are wearing clothing that protect skin from the sun including a wide brimmed hat.
- Parents/carers may choose to use sunscreen sometimes on small parts of the baby's skin. If parents/carers choose to use sunscreen, sensitive or toddler sunscreen can be provided to staff for use.

Awareness raising and education

- The SunSmart awareness messages to be promoted and positively reinforced to parents/carers of children through communication channels e.g. newsletter, notice boards and staff-parent/carer conversations.
- Staff to promote SunSmart awareness to children by including it in daily routines and intentional teaching such as role-modelling, discussions, songs, stories, games, and the use of SunSmart resources available at hse.ie/sunsmart.
- Inform staff and parents/carers about the ELC's SunSmart policy during enrolment at the ELC.

Name of Early Learning Centre

This SunSmart policy will be reviewed regularly.

This policy was last updated on:

Date

Next policy review:

Date

References

1. National Cancer registry. Cancer incidence projections for Ireland 2020-2045. Cork: NCRI; 2019.
2. Skin Cancer Prevention Plan (2019-2022). Department of Health, 2019.
3. Cancer Institute New South Wales. NSW Skin Cancer Prevention Strategy 2012-15. New South Wales; 2012.
4. Institute of Public Health (2020). Children's exposure to ultraviolet radiation - a risk profile for future skin cancers in Ireland. [Cited 31st January 2022]. Available from: www.publichealth.ie
5. Grey T, Corbett M, Heeney T, Ring E, O'Sullivan L. (2019) Universal Design Guidelines for Early Earning and Care Settings: Design for all. {Cited 1st July 2022}. Available from: www.aim.gov.ie