

# School Holiday Parent Kit

# SUN SAFETY

Summer school holidays provide endless opportunities for hours of outdoor fun. However, ultraviolet (UV) radiation levels from the sun in Australia are strongest from November to March. Children require special care to reduce the damage from UV radiation exposure, which causes sunburn and can lead to skin cancer.

The SunSmart UV Alert is a tool you can use to protect yourself from UV radiation. It indicates the amount of UV radiation from the sun that reaches the earth's surface. The higher the index value, the greater the potential for damage to your skin. When the UV index is forecast to reach three or above, you need to be SunSmart.

Unprotected sun and UV radiation exposure in the first fifteen years of life increases the chances of getting skin cancer later in life significantly.

## PLANNING THE DAY

It can take as little as 15 minutes for sunburn and skin damage to occur. UV radiation levels are strongest in the middle of the day so plan to be outdoors before 11am or after 3pm in daylight saving time – or before 10am and after 2pm during the rest of the year.

## SEEK OUT SHADE OR BRING YOUR OWN

- When you're outdoors, stay in the shade. If you're going somewhere where there are no trees or you are unsure what shade protection is available, bring your own shade, such as a large umbrella.

## DRESS SUN SMART

There are lots of cool, comfortable and fashionable clothes that offer sun protection, but they have to cover the skin to protect it. If wearing shorts go for knee length and select loose fitting clothes made from fabric which does not let light through.

- **Swimwear:** Rash vests are sold in all sizes and when teamed with long shorts are a sun-sensible swimwear solution. Look for vests that have an ultraviolet protection factor (UPF) level on their tags. The higher the number, the greater the protection from UV radiation. A UPF of 50+ gives the best protection.
- **Hats:** Hats should be worn whenever children are outside and provide protection to the face, neck and ears. Broad brimmed hats should have a brim at least 7.5 centimetres wide. Bucket style hats should have a 6 centimetre brim. Legionnaire-style hats should have a flap that covers the neck and meets the sides of the front peak to provide protection to the sides of the face. Baseball caps are not recommended. Remember that cords in hats can get caught in playground equipment and pose a serious hazard. Hats with a safety release mechanism, or bucket hats without ears, are recommended.
- **Sunglasses:** Some kids love these as a fashion accessory – but they are also important to protect young eyes from UV radiation damage. The best styles are close fitting wraparound sunglasses that stop UV radiation rays from getting in

from the side and meet the Australian Standard AS1067.

- **Sunscreen:** Sunscreen is an important sun protection measure, however it does not offer 100 percent protection from the sun. To get the most protection, sunscreen should be applied 20 minutes before going outside. Use broadspectrum SPF30+ water resistant sunscreen on areas not protected by clothing. Remember to reapply every two hours or more often if wiped, sweated or washed off.
- Clothing, hats and shade provide the best coverage for babies and very young children.

## BE A SUN SMART ROLE MODEL

Children copy those around them and learn by imitation. It is unfair to expect a child to wear a hat and sunscreen if you do not do the same. If you adopt sun smart behaviour it is more likely that children around you will pick up on the habit.

## EXPLAIN TO CHILDREN WHY SUN PROTECTION IS IMPORTANT

Children respond better when an issue is explained to them and they benefit greatly from encouragement. Discussing what UV radiation is and why you need to cover up can be an important step in starting lifelong sun protection behaviour.

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Parents with babies should always carry a tube of sunscreen, a bottle of boiled water, a small sheet or blanket, a soft legionnaires cap and a lightweight baggy romper suit which covers the legs and arms.
- Establish good summer habits at home by making sun protection an everyday practice. Encourage children to apply sunscreen every morning after they brush their teeth.

Community Services thanks these organisations for their contribution to this fact sheet and invites you to visit their websites for more information.