

Beat the Burn

Tool Kit to reduce the risk of skin cancer to nursery children

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Chapter 1

Introduction – aims and objectives of the Initiative

Health Challenge Wales

1. The key themes of Health Challenge Wales have been selected because they are considered to be those issues that constitute a significant proportion of the ill health that could be avoided. They are however neither exclusive nor exhaustive, and the challenge extends to include other health based interventions that promote and improve health. Whilst reducing the incidence of skin cancer is not specifically listed as a key theme, given the rising incidence of the disease it is an important issue that should be addressed.
2. Skin cancer is one of the most common cancers. Over 70,000 cases are registered and over 1,700 people die in the UK from malignant melanoma each year. Cases of malignant melanoma have more than doubled in the past 20 years, due to adoption of a more outdoor lifestyle, increased foreign travel and the fact that the beauty and fashion industries have promoted having a suntan as a fashionable and desirable look. The incidence of skin cancer is increasing faster than any other cancer, and it is the most common cancer in 15-34 year olds. It is estimated that up to 80% of skin cancers could be prevented by changing the attitude and behavior of people to sun exposureⁱ. Research suggests that efforts at primary prevention of skin cancer should concentrate upon ways of altering attitudes and beliefs, not supplying increasing knowledge about the disease. It is further suggested that these efforts should be directed towards children and their parentsⁱⁱ.
3. Whilst the risk of skin cancer is universal there are groups of the population more at risk than others. Typically those with fair skin and /or a large number of freckles are more at risk than those with darker skin, those who are occupationally exposed to the sun have a greater risk of skin cancer and those who have had incidents of sun burn in childhood are also demonstrably more at risk of developing skin cancer later in life.ⁱⁱⁱ
4. Babies and young children are the most at risk. Their skin is extremely delicate, up to fifteen times thinner than adults. This group is also least able to understand the need for protection and to take the necessary steps to achieve it for themselves, making protecting them from the sun a matter of paramount importance if the incidence of skin cancer is to be reduced.
5. The steps that should be taken to reduce exposure to sun and therefore reduce the risk of sun burn and later development of skin cancer are simple. They include wearing loose fitting, preferably cotton clothing and a hat whilst in the sun, avoiding the sun when it is at its hottest, between 11.30am and 3.00pm, providing and using shade to prevent exposure to sun and using a high factor (SPF 15+) sunscreen on exposed skin.

6. This initiative is designed to address the issue protecting the very young from the sun. As noted in paragraph 4 above this is the group least able to understand the need for protection and to take the necessary steps for themselves, but the group in whom a bad incident of sun burn in early life could lead to the development of skin cancer when older. This is also the group where parental responsibility for protection may be devolved to other carers, such as nurseries, either for social development or for employment reasons. It is in line with the Health Challenge Wales aspiration to reduce preventable ill health, and can be delivered by local authorities with partner organisations.

ⁱ Cancer Research UK . SunSmart – http://www.cancer-research-uk.org.uk/aboutcancer/specificcancers/non_melanoma_skincancer

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ ‘Prevention of skin cancer; a review of available strategies’ Harvey I Bristol University of Bristol Health Care Evaluation 1995.

ⁱⁱⁱ As 1 above

Chapter 2

Reducing skin cancer risk to nursery school children

Running an Initiative

1. Initial considerations

Initial considerations for this project have to be addressed, including;

- What is the target group?
- Will the outcome have the desired outcome, i.e. raising awareness of the issue of the risk of sun exposure in the very young and way to prevent it with the target group
- How can the target group be reached?
- Who are the key partners in the initiative?
- How will the initiative be evaluated?
- Will the initiative deliver value for money?

2. Target Group

The target group for the initiative is those persons running nursery schools or children's clubs that look after pre-school children during the day time. These may be local authority premises or privately run, and may also include the pre-school nursery class of primary schools. Carers, childminders and parents could also be targeted directly through nursery schools and children's clubs.

3. Achieving the desired outcome

The intervention has two desired outcomes;

- (1) to raise awareness of the risk of excessive sun exposure to young children and babies with the target group,
- (2) to promote a change in the behaviour of the target group to address the issue.

4. Reaching the Target Group

All nurseries and pre-school playgroups are required to be registered with the local authority. This registration information includes the name of the person having control of the nursery or playgroup, the address and time at which it operates and the maximum number of children that can be accommodated. This initiative makes primary contact with the target group by letter, although further contact upon request can be made through personal visits.

5. Who are the key partners in the initiative?

This initiative is capable of being run by a local authority acting alone, although greater value will be achieved by working with other organisations in partnership. The Local Health Alliance may wish to engage with this target group to promulgate further health promotion messages, and may be willing to provide funding for the project. Similarly the local Primary Care Trust may wish to engage with the project through their team of Health Visitors, Barnardos and Sure Start.

Other partners, such as the commercial sector or professional bodies with an interest in this field may also wish to be involved through providing resources or sponsorship.

6. How will the initiative be evaluated?

This is a difficult initiative to evaluate. Evidence suggests that where individuals suffer bad incidents of sun burn in childhood they are more likely to develop skin cancer in later life, but hard data in this regard is hard to gather. Evidence as to bad incidents of sun burn is largely anecdotal and relies on the individual concerned having a memory of the incident. Further the definition of what constitutes a severe episode of sun burn is not clear, meaning that the evidence in this regard is to a great degree subjective.

There will be a lag phase of some 20 years before one might expect to see a fall in the incidence of skin cancer in young adults as a result of this initiative, and one would also have to discount all other factors that may have a contributing effect to the reduction, if any, that occurred in that time, such as a change in fashion with a preference for pale skins. At its highest it can be said that this intervention addresses one of the causes of skin cancer in later life, and develops good sun habits in the very young, which may influence the way in which the individuals behave in later life to their advantage.

It should not be forgotten that an episode of sun burn is extremely painful and distressing for the sufferer, more so if that sufferer is a very small child. This initiative conducted successfully will have the effect of cutting the incidence of sun burn in small children and hence removing the risk of them suffering pain and distress as the result.

Local authorities may also like to use as measures of success the number of nurseries who have adopted and implemented the SunSmart policy as compared to those which had such policies in place prior to the initiative, and the number of children who will be affected and protected by the implementation of the policy.

7. Will the initiative deliver value for money?

Skin cancer is potentially fatal, 1,700 individuals die in the U.K. alone every year. The cost of treating an individual with skin cancer depends on the stage to which their cancer has progressed when diagnosed. Linked to the illness are issues on isolation, stress and depression. Account should also be taken on the effect on the family of the patient, which will also suffer.

As noted in 6 above it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of this campaign, and therefore whether it will deliver value for money in either the short or long term, however the cost of the intervention, based on a pilot run in Anglesey and involving 67 nurseries was less than £1000. The long term benefit in the case of each participating nursery was the putting in place of an open ended Sun Protection Policy protecting children in the future and encouraging the development of good sun practices. Considerable media interest was also generated by the initiative, further promoting the message.

Reducing skin cancer risk to nursery school children – Running an Initiative

The Initiative

Preschool play groups and nurseries are encouraged to adopt a SunSmart policy regarding protection of young children for excessive exposure to the sun, with rewards to those who do so to the satisfaction of the project group.

The campaign

1. This is an arms length campaign, which works by encouraging nurseries and play groups to adopt sun safe policies. Many nurseries and playgroups do not have policies regarding safe practices in the sun, and the level of protection offered to the children will depend on the level of awareness of the staff on duty at the time. The campaign encourages all of the nurseries and play groups targeted to adopt the same basic safe sun practices policy, and provides an incentive, in the form of a sun related prizes, for them to do so.
2. SunSmart is the UK's national skin cancer campaign. It is part of Cancer Research UK. SunSmart has produced a draft sun protection policy for pre-schools and nurseries. The policy may be down loaded from the SunSmart website^{iv} and used by interested parties. It is suggested that as this policy document has been devised by the experts in this field, and further can be accessed at no cost to the initiative organisers that it should be used when running this campaign. A copy of the policy appears as [Appendix 1](#).
3. The campaign begins by sending a letter to all of the proprietors of local nursery and pre-school groups asking those which had not already done so to consider adopting a safe sun policy. The importance of the issue is outlined in the letter to ensure that the seriousness of the campaign is understood. The letter recommends the use of the SunSmart draft policy and provides a link to it. A copy of the text of the letter used in the pilot of this initiative is shown as [Appendix 2](#).
4. In the pilot campaign the first 10 nurseries or preschool groups to respond by adopting and implementing a suitable safe sun policy were given a gazebo and a quantity of free sun hats for the children. Both elements of the prize promote the sun safe message and allow for the continued implementation of the safe sun policy.

Resource implications and funding

5. This is a relatively inexpensive campaign. Costs are officer time in the preparation and sending out of the initial correspondence and in assessing the returned policies. Follow up visits could be made by Environmental Health Officers to ensure that the policies put forward by the nurseries and pre-school groups have been adopted and implemented. A press release detailing the winning nurseries and promoting the 10 Top Tips for protecting children from the sun should also be considered. The 10 top tips appear as [Appendix 3](#). Consideration can also be given to awarding the successful nurseries and pre-school groups their 'prizes' at an event attended by the local authority portfolio holder and other elected members and guests with the local media also invited. Such an event would have implication in costs, which would have to be balanced against the value of the media coverage generated.
6. The main costs in the initiative arise from the purchase of the prizes. In the pilot project the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health funded the purchase of the 10 gazebos awarded from its 2005 Beat the Burn Initiative funding. Funded by the local Health Alliance, Anglesey's 'Beat the Burn' logo 'Slip, Slap, Slop' was included on 500 legionnaire's hats (which cover the nape of the neck and ears), and distributed to children from the first ten nurseries to implement the policy. Free SunSmart materials were also distributed to carers, childminders and parents to reinforce sun safety messages at home.

Following up the event

7. The success of this initiative requires those nurseries and pre-school groups that adopt a safe sun policy to continue to implement it. To ensure the on-going implementation of the policy the local authority and its partners may wish to carry out cold call follow up visits to the premises to assist in maintaining enthusiasm levels.
8. The local authority may issue guidance to parents considering placing their children in nurseries about what to look for and what questions to ask of the staff at the premises. A question regarding safe sun policy can be added to the questions to be asked, and parents should be encouraged to look out for equipment and facilities that protect children from the sun whilst at the nursery or pre-school group.

Appendix 1

SunSmart Guidelines for Nurseries and pre-schools

See file – “[15 b Nursery Guidelines.pdf](#)”

Appendix 2

Dear Sir / Madam.

Ref: Beat the Burn campaign - SunSmart Protection Policy

Skin cancer is one of the most common and the most preventable cancers in the United Kingdom. Shockingly, 69,000 new cases are reported every year and this number is set to double in the next twenty years. Protecting our skins from the UV (ultraviolet) sunlight will reduce the risk of developing skin cancer.

Babies and young children are the most at risk. Their skin is extremely delicate, up to fifteen times thinner than adults. Intense skin exposure or sunburn in childhood doubles the risk of developing skin cancer later in life.

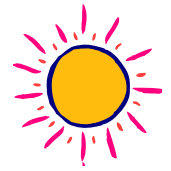
As a Local Authority, we highly commend SunSmart, a national skin cancer prevention campaign run by Cancer Research UK. It aims to raise awareness and provide information about skin cancer and sun protection. SunSmart have developed a sun protection policy specifically for nurseries, and if you have not already done so, we would recommend that you consider developing and implementing this policy in your nursery.

In order to encourage nurseries to sign up to this principle, we will be awarding a gazebo and free sun hats to the first ten nurseries who put into practice a sun protection policy and send a copy of their policy to the above address.

I enclose a copy of the guidance document outlining the principles of the policy with additional information about the SunSmart campaign. If you require any advice or information, do not hesitate to contact us or alternatively the SunSmart campaign team on their website.

<http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sunsmart/>

I look forward to hearing from you.



Ten tips for protecting children in the sun

- **Use shade**

Keep babies in complete shade: under trees, umbrellas, canopies or indoors.

- **Cover them up**

Dress children in cotton clothing that is baggy, close-weave and cool. Oversized T-shirts are good for covering most of their skin.

- **Use dry clothing**

Remember that wet clothing stretches and can lose up to half of its UV protection – put children in dry clothing after playing in water.

- **Protect shoulders and necks**

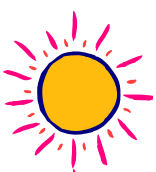
Don't put children in vest tops or sundresses if they are spending a lot of time outdoors –shoulders and backs of necks get easily burned.

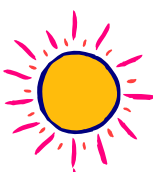
- **Wear sunglasses**

Buy good quality, wraparound sunglasses for children, as soon as they can wear them. Sunglasses don't have to be expensive brands, but toy sunglasses can do more harm than good.

- **Find hats they like**

Encourage children to wear hats with brims, especially if they are not wearing sunglasses. The wider the brim, the more skin will be shaded from the sun.





- **Use sunscreen wisely**

Apply factor 15+ sunscreen 15-30 minutes before children go outdoors. Then reapply generously once outside to be sure of good coverage. Don't forget their shoulders, nose, ears, cheeks and tops of feet.

- **Remember sunscreen washes off**

Always use waterproof sunscreen (factor 15+) when children are swimming or playing outdoors with water. Reapply after towelling.

- **Don't forget school times**

Remember play times and lunch breaks on summer school days too. Give children a hat to wear and, if they can't apply sunscreen at school cover their exposed skin with factor 15+ before they go.

- **Remember you can burn in the UK**

The Great British sun is quite capable of burning your child! Take extra care at home as well as abroad.

- **Know the shadow rule**

If your shadow is longer than you are, then you are safe from the sun. When your shadow is shorter than you are tall, the sun can burn you.

