

Hat Tips for Schools

Rationale for wearing sun protective hats

Schools take great care to exercise their duty of care to ensure that their students are protected against foreseeable harm. Sunburn and skin cancer are foreseeable outcomes of overexposure to the sun. The damage done to the skin from even one episode of overexposure to the sun can never be fully repaired. Overexposure to UV radiation during childhood and adolescence increases the chances of developing skin cancer later in life.

Common sites of skin damage and skin cancer are the neck, ears, temples, lips, face and nose. These areas are constantly exposed to the sun and generally receive more ultraviolet (UV) radiation than other body parts. Wearing an appropriate hat is one way to protect these areas.

Recommendation

Cancer Council recommends hats that provide good shade to the face, back of the neck, eyes and ears when in the sun. Research shows that broad-brimmed, bucket and legionnaire hats provide satisfactory UV radiation protection. Baseball style caps offer little protection to the head and face and are therefore not recommended as school hats. Hats should be worn when the UV Index is 3 or above (along with other sun protection). In Western Australia, the UV Index reaches levels above 3 in all four terms (not just terms 1 and 4).



Tips to introducing a sun protective hat

- Gain support from school administration and parent bodies (e.g. school board or P&C). The P&C may subsidise hats for students.
- Update school dress code policies to include a sun protective hat.
- Ensure the uniform shop sells a sun protective hat and not a cap. Students can't wear a hat if it's not an option at all.
- Ensure all teachers, staff and parents are good role models and wear a sun protective hat when on duty, conducting outside lessons, or any time they are exposed to the sun. This will also ensure that they are protected from UV.
- Involve students in the choice and/or design of new school hats. The student leadership team can drive this process.
- Consider a reversible hat with a faction colour on the inside.
- Select hats that do not have a school logo printed on them. Students can then use the hat as their general-purpose hat. This is especially effective when parents are faced with buying several types of hats.
- Set a date on which students need to start wearing the new hat. The start of the school year or term work well. Let students, parents and staff know the date through a variety of communication channels (e.g. social media, newsletters, assemblies, announcements, meetings).
- Alternatively, hat wearing can be introduced in stages, particularly in high schools. Start with hats being a requirement for PE lessons and/or lower grades and build.
- Have older/influential students and student council members role model hat wearing.
- Have a reward system for students who wear the correct style of hat.
- Change the 'no hat - no play' rule to 'no sun protective hat - play in the shade' rule to encourage physical activity. Ensure there are some spare hats for students, especially for PE lessons.
- Relax the uniform rule to allow non-uniform hats to be worn, (even if it's only for a transition period) providing they are broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire style hats.

How one school did it

Caps off (and bucket hats on) to O'Connor PS

O'Connor Primary School in Kalgoorlie has turned from students predominately wearing caps to the whole school embracing a sun protective hat in just a few months. With a school population of 776 students, it was achieved with team effort, whole school support and enthusiasm.

Identifying the issue

The process of becoming a SunSmart School was driven by junior sport specialist teacher Mr Ashley Sims. Prior to becoming a SunSmart School, it was identified that the biggest challenge to ensuring students were better protected from UV radiation was wearing the correct sun protective hats. Most of the students wore caps, with a survey of students finding that only 28% wore sun protective hats. As a result, the school was keen to implement a bucket hat and encourage all children to wear it. It was understood that the staff, students and parents would have to work together to turn this around.



Finding solutions

As a starting point, teachers were encouraged to be role models and wear a bucket hat which were sourced by Mr Sims and proved to be very popular.

“The teachers were very keen to wear the bucket hats and I soon had other teachers asking for the hats. This is a great thing that I didn't want to deter.”

A SunSmart Committee was formed comprising of teachers from each phase, the Principal and Cancer Council WA representative. The committee drafted a sun protection policy and worked to get sun protective practices more entrenched in the school and supported by the whole school community.

The P&C agreed to introduce a new reversible bucket hat that showed the school colours on one side, and each faction colour on the other. The P&C also agreed to subsidise the new hat to only cost students \$4 each.

In addition, in 2016 they provided every Kindy and Pre-Primary student with a free hat, and from 2017, all Kindy students will receive a free hat courtesy of the P&C.

Students were provided incentives for wearing the correct school hat, with particular focus on the school student leaders role modelling for younger students to make it 'cool' to wear a bucket hat.

By the start of 2016, about 80% of students were wearing the school bucket hats, with a 'no SunSmart hat, play in the undercover area' rule implemented. Further promotion was done by Mr Sims through a colouring in and poster competition.

By the third week of term 1, 95% of students were wearing the school bucket hat. At this point, O'Connor Primary School officially became a SunSmart school with a launch at assembly.

Strategies to increase sun protection

- The school administration, staff and P&C supported the need to improve sun protection.
- Several school staff completed the Generation SunSmart learning modules.
- A new school bucket hat was introduced to replace the caps previously worn by students. The new hat has been well received by students, teachers and parents with just about all of the 800 students wearing one.
- Teachers were provided with bucket hats to role model the correct behaviours to students.
- Students were provided with incentives and rewards for wearing the correct hat.
- A new 'no SunSmart hat, play in the undercover area' rule was implemented.
- A poster/colouring in competition was held to build excitement and interest.
- Teachers were surveyed at regular intervals to establish how many students were wearing the new bucket hats.
- Newsletter items and announcements on assemblies.
- Information added to the school website.
- A committed group of school staff formed a committee to drive the new sun protection measures.
- A policy was developed and endorsed by the school community.
- A Cancer Council WA representative spoke to kindergarten parents on sun protection.

For more information contact:

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