



Cancer Society of New Zealand
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BURNING TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL

In little over a week, many thousands of New Zealand school children will be returning to school, ironically at a time when the fickle weather is finally settling into what a Kiwi summer ought to be.

“That means blue skies, bright sunshine...and potentially skin damage that might lead to skin cancer in later life,” says Cancer Society Skin Cancer Prevention Advisor, Dr Judith Galtry.

She says one of the worrying things about children going back to school is that parents no longer have control over ensuring their child is protected from the effects of New Zealand’s intense UV radiation.

“Children are in the school environment five days a week, during most of the period of peak UV radiation, that is, from October to March between 11am to 4pm,” Dr Galtry says. “No-one wants to see children shut up inside all day to avoid the sun, but there are many simple, sensible steps schools can take to ensure the children under their care are protected while still enjoying all the pleasures of long hot days.”

The Cancer Society offers a national SunSmart Schools Accreditation Policy (SSAP) which provides accreditation for schools that develop and implement a comprehensive sun protection policy.

“It has been really well accepted since we first offered accreditation just over a year ago, but we’d like to see all New Zealand schools following the same guidelines.

“Children don’t think twice about wearing a cycle helmet; they automatically click on their seatbelts. We’d like to think, that if all schools implemented sun protection policies, as second nature children would wear a hat that protects the face, neck and ears; seek out shade; wear sun safe clothing e.g. shirts with collars and sleeves and use SPF 30 + sunscreen on uncovered skin; .”

Dr Galtry says none of these measures impacts on the child's enjoyment of the day, "but they don't go home red, raw and sore with potentially even worse downstream effects".

"As a parent myself, I know I would be going to my child's school to ensure it is SunSmart Accredited, following the guidelines laid out in the policy. If I were running a school, I would see it as not only a matter of pride, but a duty, to make sure the children under my care were safe in every way.

"It is not even very difficult to develop and carry out a good sun protection policy, with the Cancer Society having done most of the work through providing all the material schools and parents need on its SunSmart Schools website"

Dr Galtry says any school that would like to adopt an SSAP can find out more about it by going to the SunSmart Schools website: www.sunsmartschools.co.nz .

"And we hope parents will encourage their children's schools to become SunSmart Accredited. The old saying 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' is as true now as it ever was."

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For more information:

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