



**Cancer Society New Zealand
Te Kāhui Matepukupuku o Aotearoa**

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Cancer Society programme to help schools be 'SunSmart'

An Otago University study has found that before the Cancer Society's SunSmart Schools Accreditation Programme (SSAP) was launched nationally in October 2005, not a single school in a randomly selected sample of 242 fully met all 12 of the programme criteria.

The baseline survey results, recently published in the Oxford University Press journal *Health Education Research*, indicate plenty of opportunity for improvement with only 4% of schools already meeting either 11 or 10 of the criteria, most (69%) meeting seven or less, and 9% meeting only three or less.

Implementing SSAP reduces the risk of excessive and harmful exposure to solar ultraviolet radiation (UVR) for children while at school. It includes school policies and practices for hats and other clothing, curriculum content, role modelling, environmental shade and rescheduling of outdoor activities to times when solar ultraviolet radiation levels are less high.

Lead author, Dr Tony Reeder, Director of the Cancer Society Social and Behavioural Research Unit at Dunedin School of Medicine, said that among the most difficult requirements is students wearing suitable sun protective hats and other clothing. At baseline only 44% of schools required students to wear appropriate sun protective hats - either a 7.5cm. broad-brimmed, legionnaire or bucket-style hat.

Only half the schools surveyed were able to provide a school sun protection policy document and a similar proportion indicated that they included some teaching about sun protection at all class levels. However, most schools (80%) did provide sun protection information to parents at enrolment.

Co-author, Jan Jopson, said that the detailed survey information was important because it identified areas where the greatest challenges lay and means subsequent efforts to promote the programme can be evaluated. Schools will be surveyed again late in 2009 in order to document any changes.

Mary Duignan, SunSmart Schools Advisor for the Cancer Society said there was evidence that a growing number of schools were getting involved in the SSAP. "I am optimistic that the follow-up survey will find significant movement within schools towards meeting a greater number of the SunSmart criteria."

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