

Importance of sun protection & never using sunbeds among adolescents

The HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) in partnership with Healthy Ireland wish to draw your attention to the importance of sun protection and the need to discourage the use of sunbeds among adolescents. We would be grateful if you could share the following information with parents, guardians and staff within your school community.

Skin cancer is one of the most common cancers with over 11,000¹ cases diagnosed annually and this number is projected to double by 2045². Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation, sunburn and sunbed use in childhood are risk factors for developing skin cancer in adult life.

We would encourage principals or parent teacher associations to order our free resources, which from www.healthpromotion.ie and distribute them in your school community.

Trends in sun protection and sunbed use among adolescents

Levels of self-reported childhood sunburn in Ireland are high with 9 out of 10 schoolchildren aged 10 to 17 reporting at least one experience of sunburn.

8 out of 10 schoolchildren report wearing sunscreen and 7 out of 10 report using sunglasses on sunny days. Adoption of other sun protection measures, like covering up, wearing hats and avoiding peak UV hours, is less consistent.

3% of 10- to 17-year-olds report having used a sunbed³. Providing a sunbed service to anyone under the age of 18 is a breach of the Public Health (Sunbeds) Act 2014.

Additional information on the dangers of sunbed use for teenagers: Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of ultraviolet (UV) radiation from sunbeds. Their skin is still developing, making it more susceptible to DNA damage that can lead to melanoma and other skin cancers. Evidence shows that using a sunbed before the age of 35 increases the risk of melanoma by up to 59%. Sunbed UV rays can also cause premature ageing, eye damage, and weaken the immune system. There is no safe level of exposure to UV radiation from sunbeds, and teens may be influenced by social pressures around tanning, making clear guidance and strong protective messages essential.

Schools can help by:

- Encouraging the whole school community to use a combination of sun protection measures whenever UV Index levels reach 3 or higher.
- Teach students about sun safety especially in the SPHE programme, ensuring that students receive age-appropriate instruction on the importance of sun protection and how to incorporate sun safety practices into their daily lives, including the SunSmart 5 S's.
- Teach students about the severe, long-term dangers of using sunbeds and that it is illegal for anyone under 18 to use, hire or buy a sunbed.
- Work towards a safe school environment that provides shade for students, staff and the

¹ National Cancer Registry of Ireland, 2025. Skin Cancer: Cancer Trends Report. Cork

² National Cancer Registry of Ireland, 2019. Cancer Incidence Projections for Ireland 2020- 2045 Cork

³ MCAVOY, H., RODRIGUEZ, L., KÖLTÖ, A. & NICGABHAINN, S. 2020. Children's exposures to ultraviolet radiation - a risk profile for future skin cancers in Ireland. Dublin

school community at appropriate times.

- The new SunSmart School Toolkit for Primary Schools Resource provides your school with information, resources and support to become a SunSmart School. By completing some simple steps your school could be accredited by the HSE's NCCP as a SunSmart School. The pack is available to order or download in English and Irish by [clicking here](#).
- Assist students to be responsible for their own sun protection.

Parents and guardians can help to protect children and young people by:

- Parents can promote sun safety by acting as role models, enforcing the SunSmart 5 S's of slip on clothing, slop on sunscreen, slap on a wide-brimmed hat, seek shade and slide on sunglasses.
- Talking to your child about the fact that tanning is a sign of skin damage rather than a sign of good health. Parents and guardians play a key role in reinforcing these messages and supporting healthy behaviours.
- Educating your child on the severe, long-term dangers of sunbeds and about the fact that, in Ireland, it is illegal for anyone under 18 to use, hire, or buy a sunbed under the Public Health (Sunbeds) Act 2014.

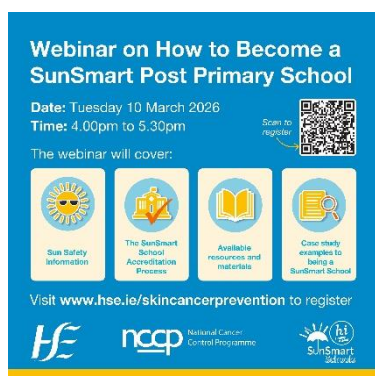
HSE Links to information and resources:

[SunSmart School Toolkit for Post Primary Schools Resource](#)

[HSE Making Healthy Choices 2 - Activity 15 – Being SunSmart](#)

[Read the facts about sunbeds](#)

[It's never ok to use a sunbed](#)



To watch: A webinar on How to Become a SunSmart School ran on 10th March 2026

This webinar is for post-primary school teachers. This webinar covers

- Sun safety information
- The SunSmart school accreditation process
- Resources and materials available to you
- Case studies of SunSmart schools

[Watch back by clicking here](#)

The HSE's NCCP and Healthy Ireland appreciate your assistance in sharing this information and supporting national efforts to reduce skin cancer risk among young people. To order SunSmart posters for your school, visit www.healthpromotion.ie and choose 'cancer' on the drop-down menu. For more information email prevention@cancercontrol.ie or visit www.hse.ie/sunsmart

Thank you for your continued cooperation in promoting the health and wellbeing of students.

Yours sincerely,

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