

Protecting Our Tamariki from UV Radiation

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Introduction

Childhood is a critical time to avoid over-exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. Teaching tamariki SunSmart behaviours will help them develop lifelong sun safe practices. Excessive UV radiation can cause skin damage including sunburn. These in turn increase the risk of developing skin cancer including melanoma in later life.

Teaching tamariki to **Slip** on a shirt/top with long sleeves and a collar and into shade; **Slop** on sunscreen that is at least SPF 30 broad spectrum and water resistant; **Slap** on a broad brimmed hat that shades the face, head, neck and ears; and **Wrap** on close fitting sunglasses are the five recommended SunSmart steps to use when the UV index is 3 or above^a. Routinely using these steps when UV is harmful reduces the risk of damage to delicate skin and eyes.

Discussion

Approximately 95% of New Zealand children participate in pre-school education; most commonly from 20-23 hours per week (1). As tamariki are away from their families for this length of time, it is essential that their caregivers understand the importance of being SunSmart over the daylight saving months when UV can cause harm. Caregivers also need to understand the role of Vitamin D and know when it is appropriate for children to have their skin exposed to the sun.

In October 2017 the Cancer Society of New Zealand released a **free** online training module for those working in Early Childhood Education (ECEs) facilities to learn about when and why it is important to practice SunSmart behaviours with young children. The module also provides teachers with the tools to support their centres to do so. If participants attain 80% in the questions at the end of the module, they receive a certificate and a reminder of their own identified call to SunSmart action. These can also be used as evidence that the teacher is meeting the Code of Professional Responsibility through:

- commitment to learners – promoting the wellbeing of learners and protecting them from harm

^a NIWA. UVI forecast for Specific Sites [webpage]: <https://www.niwa.co.nz/our-services/online-services/uv-and-ozone/forecasts>
Health Promotion Agency. Sun Protection Alert [webpage]: <https://www.sunsmart.org.nz/sun-protection-alert>
Burke, J. UV2Day [app]. <https://itunes.apple.com/nz/app/uv2day/id1074125213?mt=8>
<https://play.google.com/store/search?q=uv2day&c=apps>

- commitment to families and whānau - engaging families and whānau in their children's learning
- the Standards of Professional Learning and Professional Relationships.

The training module has been promoted through early childhood education networks and has been very well received. Registrations have come in daily, with many centres having all their staff participate. There has also been a wide range of early childhood education groups undertake the training – these include kindergartens, day care centres, Māori Providers, PORSE (in-home childcare) and Montessori.

Specific statistics from March 2018 include:

- 416 registered participants have completed the module
- 176 of these are senior teachers/managers of their centre
- Participants come from 316 early childhood centres
- Participants come from 174 towns and cities around NZ

Our free module can be accessed on

cancernz.org.nz/early-childhood-sunsmart-pd-module. Anyone can register as a parent and view the contents of our free resource.

Conclusions

It is essential to protect young children from being harmed from the sun's UV. Early childhood settings are ideal places to target the routine use of the five SunSmart steps to children and their carers (including parents and ECE staff).

References

1. New Zealand Immigration. (2018). *Preschool care and education* [cited 2018]. Retrieved from: [tps://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/living-in-nz/education/childcare-preschool](https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/living-in-nz/education/childcare-preschool)