

Evaluation of the SunSmart Schools accreditation programme

B. M. McNoe¹, A. I. Reeder¹

1. Cancer Society Social and Behavioural Research Unit, Department of Preventive and Social Medicine, Dunedin School of Medicine, University of Otago, Dunedin.

Abstract. In 2017 the Cancer Society conducted an evaluation of their flagship SunSmart Primary Schools Accreditation Programme. This evaluation included our survey of school principals for which key results are provided in this presentation.

Introduction

The SunSmart Schools Accreditation Programme (SSAP), launched nationally in New Zealand in 2005, follows WHO guidelines for ‘best practice’ for addressing sun protective practices in primary schools (World Health Organization 2003). Administration and provision of resources is coordinated nationally, with programme delivery provided by each of the six Cancer Society Divisions at a regional level. As it was 12 years since the launch of the SSAP and eight years since the previous evaluation, it was timely to reassess sun protection policies and practices in primary schools and see how well the SSAP was working for schools.

Primary school principals completed a survey about school: 1). provision of personal and environmental sun protection; 2). sun protection practices. Survey responses were also evaluated against the SSAP 12 minimum criteria.

Discussion

Of the 2013 schools invited, 1243 (62%) participated and 4% (n=80) actively declined to participate in the survey. These schools represent 322,272 students, or 62% of the total primary school population. The schools that responded to the survey represent ‘all schools’ well in terms of school socioeconomic decile rating, type, size and Cancer Society Division.

Awareness of the programme was extremely high, with most respondents (85%) reporting they had heard of the programme and 90% of these knowing that it was the Cancer Society that funded it.

Key barriers to participation in the programme included: a lack of information about the programme (45%), that the school lacked the resources to comply with the programme (30%) or had made a conscious choice not to join (30%). Aspects of the programme most difficult to comply with were the provision of a sun protective hat (52%), the rescheduling of events (52%) and having adequate shade (46%).

With the exception of the provision of shade and rescheduling of outdoor events, SunSmart accredited schools performed statistically better than non-accredited schools for all of the minimum SunSmart Schools accreditation criteria (Table 1).

Table 1. Minimum criteria for SunSmart Schools Accreditation

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| Schools must have a sun protection policy. |
| Sun protection policy is implemented using terms 1 & 4 when UVR are most intense. |
| All staff, students & parents/caregivers are to be informed of the sun protection policy and its intended practices. |
| All students wear a broad brimmed (minimum 7.5 cm brim), Legionnaire’s or bucket hat (minimum 6cm brim, deep crown) when outside. |
| Students not wearing a hat are required to play in allocated shade areas. |
| The use of SPF 30+ broad-spectrum sunscreen (or higher) is encouraged. |
| The use of sun protective clothing is encouraged. |
| Staff are encouraged to act as role models by practising SunSmart behaviours. |
| SunSmart education programmes are regularly included in the curriculum. |
| The sun protection policy is reflected in the planning of all outdoor events (e.g. camps, excursions, sporting events). |
| The school has sufficient shade or is working towards increasing the number of trees and shade structures so as to provide adequate shade in the school grounds. |
| The Board of Trustees and principal review the sun protection policy regularly, including making suggestions or improvements at least once every 3 years. |

Most schools implemented sun protection practices in Terms 1 and 4 rather than relying on the level of UVR on a particular day. A small percentage of schools were incorrectly using temperature/sun to determine when sun protection is needed.

Knowledge of the Cancer Society SunSmart resources was low (34%), but principals who were aware of them rated them extremely highly (mean score 8/10) and reported being likely to use them, particularly with younger students.

Conclusions

The major finding from this study is that it illustrates that participation in the comprehensive SunSmart schools accreditation programme was positively associated with more sun protective policies and practices in the primary school setting.

References

World Health Organization 2003. Sun Protection and Schools. How to Make a Difference.