

Shade for Kids: Fact Sheet 1

Creating a Shade Strategy at Your School



Photo: Bruce Day

Why shade?

The Canadian Dermatology Association estimates that one in seven children born today in Canada will develop skin cancer later in life. Why? Because of over-exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR). In fact, one blistering sunburn during childhood can double the risk of getting cancer. UVR has also been linked to cataracts, suppression of the body's immune system and the development of allergies (McMichael, A.J., Haines, A., Slooff, R. and Kovats, S. Eds. *Climate Change and Human Health*).

Children are at school during the highest risk period of the day – between 10 am and 4 pm. They spend a significant amount of this time outdoors (1 to 3 hours per day) for recess, lunch, physical education, field trips, outdoor education and extra-curricular activities. In most cases, they have little choice about exposure to the sun.

One of the most effective ways of protecting students and staff from UVR is to plant shade trees where people congregate — for example, around playground equipment, benches and tables, and along sports fields to offer refuge for spectators, players and officials.

A shade strategy will ensure your school understands and supports the important role shade plays in the health of students. When students plant trees, education and protection go hand in hand.

Getting Started

Step one is to hold a meeting. The whole school community should be involved: students, teachers, principals, parents, neighbours, school trustees, school board administrators, caretakers, and maintenance staff. A representative from your local Public Health organization would be an important person to invite as well. Children's health is everyone's responsibility and everyone has a role to play.

At the meeting:

- present the rationale for shade
- select a coordinator to champion the development of the strategy
- form a committee to work with the coordinator on the strategy

Once the committee is formed, begin researching what your school is currently doing to promote sun safety.

- When are students outdoors and for how long?
- Is there any shade? Where? Where is more shade needed?
- Do students and teachers wear hats and protective clothing?
- Is sunscreen currently being encouraged and properly used?
- Is sun safety included in the school curriculum?

Use the results of your research to start building a strategy unique to your school. Structure your strategy using the following four elements.

The Four Elements of an Effective Shade Strategy

1. Rationale
2. Statement of Purpose
3. Goals
4. Roles and Responsibilities

1. Rationale

Why shade? The strategy needs to summarize the risks of overexposure to UVR, including rates of skin cancer in Canada, the vulnerability of children and the dangers of over-exposure to sun as a child. It should also explain that skin cancer is largely preventable.

The SunSmart program in Australia has a comprehensive summary of the risks of sun exposure, as well as information on how to create a strategy at your school <http://www.sunsmart.com.au/>.

2. Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose describes the sun-safety vision being promoted at your school. Put it in a prominent place for the school community to see and follow. For example:

At Evergreen Public School we want our staff and students to enjoy the sun safely. We will work with staff, students and parents to achieve this through sun-safety education, planting shade trees and promoting the use of protective clothing and sunscreen.

3. The Goals

The goals of a shade strategy are two-fold:

- to educate the school community on the need for shade and sun protection
- to provide protection from the sun

Achieve education goals by:

- health education programming
- teacher education
- school assemblies
- letters to parents and the school community
- planting trees

Achieve protection goals by:

- promoting the use of protective clothing (hats, t-shirts and sunglasses)
- promoting the use of sunscreen
- planting shade trees in active and passive play areas
- building shade structures
- scheduling outdoor activities in non-peak sun times
- organizing activities in the shade

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Who will be responsible for implementing the strategy? Some questions to guide your discussion and decision making:

- Who will be responsible for creating and enforcing the shade strategy – the school, school board or both?
- Who will be responsible for informing the school community about the health risks associated with exposure to UVR – the school board, the principal, the teachers, the shade committee, health professionals?
- Who will be responsible for developing and implementing the various aspects of the strategy?
- Who will be responsible for reviewing and modifying the strategy – the shade committee, the school board or the principal?

Once you've thought through the four elements and reached some decisions, write up your strategy in a short document that you can use to promote your cause and refer back to.

Next steps?

Ready, set, design. See Fact Sheet 5, *Designing for Shade*.

Resources

Greenwood, J.S., G.P. Soulos, and N.D. Thomas. *Undercover: Guidelines for shade planning and design*. Sydney: NSW Cancer Council and NSW Health Department, 1998.

School Ground Greening: Designing for Shade and Energy Conservation. 2004. TDSB and Evergreen. www.evergreen.ca/en/lg/tdsb-guide

Evergreen's website: www.evergreen.ca

Sunsmart school policy guidelines:

www.cancerresearchuk.org/sunsmart/schoolsandchildren/schoolpolicyguidelines/