

Successful School-Based Skin Cancer Prevention Activities

School-based skin cancer prevention campaigns are slowly beginning to multiply across the United States. School nurses, PTA staff, concerned parents, and other individuals are spearheading sun-safety awareness programs targeting formal classroom instruction, school environments, and extra-curricular events. Most sun-safety advocates have either experienced skin cancer themselves or have sadly observed its negative impact on a loved one.

During the last two years, the federal government and several skin cancer organizations have collectively recognized at least ten schools for demonstrating remarkable success in integrating sun-safety measures into their standard operation. Following is a compilation of the key activities and approaches they have implemented. You are encouraged to review these suggestions and consider what you might do to promote sun-safety practices at your school.

- 1) Provide skin cancer prevention talks to key school staff and parent groups highlighting both the importance of school sun safety and the ready accessibility of related educational materials.
- 2) Identify parent/staff skin cancer survivors to share their stories with staff and students.
- 3) Enlist an articulate dermatologist to “adopt a school” and provide relevant presentations.
- 4) Incorporate skin cancer prevention teaching materials into annual classroom lesson plans.
- 5) In science class, explore the light spectrum tied to cancer and study stratospheric ozone loss.
- 6) In history or social science class discuss the changing social value regarding tanning our skin.
- 7) Give students the homework assignment of performing a skin self-examination.
- 8) Include sun-safety information in the student/parent school handbook.
- 9) Prepare a sun-safety article to run in the school newspaper. Send a “reprint” home to parents.
- 10) Survey parents and students RE their sun-related habits (e.g., use of sunscreen, hats, etc.).
- 11) Recruit students to distribute sun-safety brochures, flyers, and posters, etc., around campus.
- 12) The school’s photo club can photo-document the campus pre- and post-intervention (shade?).
- 13) The student ecology club can locate free trees and strategically plant them on campus.
- 14) The student water polo team can conduct a product review of sunscreen and identify preferred brands for use on campus (e.g., in the boys’ and girls’ locker rooms).
- 15) The PTA may purchase sun-safety hats for all students at a given school.
- 16) Organize sun-protection relay races and include sun-safety props in the contest.
- 17) Conduct a “silly hat” contest to ease students into consistently wearing hats outdoors.
- 18) At the start of each winter season, alert students and staff regarding the elevated UV levels encountered at higher altitudes, especially where there is heavy snow.
- 19) Promote the use of self-tanning lotions to students as a viable alternative to tanning beds (or lying out) for preparing for special school events such as the prom or spring break.

- 20) Demonstrate the existence and effect of UV rays by contrasting the color of UV-reactive beads or frisbees in indoor versus outdoor settings.
- 21) On a random basis, bring some type of edible treat (e.g., popsicles) and distribute them to all students who engage in a predetermined sun-protection behavior (e.g., wearing a sun-safety hat).
- 22) Have a teacher wear a bonnet (yesteryear's fashion) and distribute a picture of an early 20th century beach scene, including people wearing long clothing, to stimulate sun-safety discussion.
- 23) As a class project, create a sun-safety mascot (e.g., a "seagator" or "Alex the Alligator") to post or set up on campus to remind students and faculty to practice sun-protective behaviors.
- 24) Have teachers/students design skin cancer prevention posters for display around campus.
- 25) Prepare a sun-safety display case complete with bears, sand, umbrellas, and sunscreen, etc.
- 26) Help students create skin cancer prevention PSAs, recorded and aired on local radio stations.
- 27) Help students write a sun-safety song and perform it for students, parents, and civic clubs.
- 28) Assist students to design a sun-protection video and/or web site.
- 29) Encourage students and staff to get more trees and shade structures placed on campus.
- 30) Create a draft sun-safety resolution and present it for adoption by the state PTA or the health section of the local board of education.
- 31) Work to introduce school-targeted state legislation that: A) requires annual sun-safety instruction; B) allows students to wear hats and apply sunscreen; and C) mandates a specified minimum campus shade cover (square feet per student?).
- 32) Examples of successful approaches to raise money to support sun-safety measures:
 - A) Apply for a grant from a local dermatology chapter or the American Medical Association's "Spouses of Doctors Foundation."
 - B) Negotiate with a wholesaler to secure a large lot of sun-safety hats. Affix the school logo on the hats and sell them at the school store and at special campus events.
 - C) Create a sun-safety puppet show and sell tickets (\$6 - \$9) for students/parents to attend.
 - D) Host a sun-protection walk-a-thon (\$10,000 was raised at a single event in New Mexico).
 - E) Host a jump-rope-a-thon (\$35,000 was raised at a single event in Texas).
 - F) Hold a bake sale.

-The above compilation was prepared by Andrew Manthe, MPH, CHES, Chief, Skin Cancer Prevention Program, California Department of Public Health (E-mail: andrew.manthe@cdph.ca.gov)