



ACT SunSmart Schools and Services Program Frequently Asked Questions

Q. When is sun protection actually recommended in Canberra?

A combination of the 5 national sun protection measures are recommended when daily UV levels reach **3 and above**. So depending on your geographical location your sun protection times may differ throughout the day and year. In Canberra daily UV levels reach 3 and above for part of or most of the day between August and May.

The best way to know *when* sun protection *is* and is *not* really necessary is to view the **Daily SunSmart UV Index** for your city or town. When daily UV levels are forecast to reach **3 and above** the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) will issue a **SunSmart UV Alert** for your city or town which signals that sun protection is recommended.

For more information or to view the UV Index visit:
<http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/uv/>

Q. Do children need to remain inside between 10am and 3pm ALL year round?

No, ACT schools *and* childhood services should always take **particular care** when outdoors during this time of the day because UV levels reach their daily peak. So take that extra care when you're out and about between 10am and 2pm.

However as UV levels become more intense during the daylight saving period of the year, schools and childhood services should be **minimising** their time outdoors as much as reasonably practicable. So between 11am and 3pm during the daylight saving period **minimise** outdoor activities-basically if you don't really have to be outdoors during this strong UV period- don't! Remember sun protection will still be necessary before and after this period if UV levels are 3 or above!

Q. What does it mean to “minimise” time outdoors between 11am and 3pm during daylight saving time?

During the daylight savings time of the year (around October to March) between 11am and 3pm, daily UV radiation levels are **HIGH to EXTREME** and the potential to cause skin damage is greatly increased during this period. Whilst it is best to try to *avoid* outdoor activities during this period, we do recognise that early childhood services and schools have to manage a wide range of needs for the children and students under their care.

Therefore, it is safer to ***at least minimise*** both the ***frequency*** (how often you go outside) and duration (how long you stay outside) of outdoor activities between 11am-3pm during this period of the year.

If children and staff are outside, always use a combination of the **5** sun protection measures when UV levels reach 3 and above.

Q. Can we spend more time outside IF we have good shade?

The short answer is NO. Well designed shade (natural or constructed) is one of the most effective ways to reduce direct exposure to the sun’s UV radiation.

However, even with good shade children can still be exposed to UV radiation because:

- They are active and move in and out of shade
- UV radiation can reflect in from the side, or from surfaces and walls- for example sandpits are highly reflective.
- Even the best shade cannot block out 100% UV radiation.

Shade is just **one** component of a comprehensive sun protection strategy.

Q. How do I know if the children are getting enough Vitamin D?

Vitamin D, which is needed to develop and maintain strong and healthy bones is made in the body when the skin is exposed to the sun’s ultraviolet radiation. Almost all vitamin D comes from the sun’s UVR. A small amount of vitamin D can be obtained from some foods, such as fish, meat and eggs, but usually this is not enough to keep us healthy.

In Australia most children should receive enough UVR to maintain adequate vitamin D levels through the incidental sun exposure they receive during their day-to-day outdoor activities.

Regular use of sunscreen when UV levels are 3 and above will not inhibit you getting enough vitamin D

Children who may be at risk of low vitamin D levels include those with mothers who have low levels, children with naturally dark skin who require more UV exposure to produce adequate vitamin D levels as the pigment in their skin reduces UV penetration, or those children who cover their faces and bodies for cultural or religious reasons.

Parents who are concerned about their child's vitamin D levels should speak to their GP. For further information download our new brochure **How much sun is enough? Getting the balance right. Vitamin D and sun Protection.**

Q. Why do children with very fair skin need more protection?

Skin type is genetically determined and ranges from fair to dark (Type 1 to 6 skin). Children with very fair or fair skin that burns easily have a tendency to freckle and tan poorly or not at all.

This is because skin that is white, fair or pale has little melanin. Melanin is the brown/black pigment that gives skin its colour which works as a defence mechanism to protect the body from UV radiation. When skin is exposed to UV radiation, melanin reacts by becoming darker and giving skin a tanned appearance.

Over-exposure to UV radiation can damage all skin types, including olive and dark skins and those that tan easily. However, the risk of long term skin damage, sunburn and skin cancer is highest amongst with children with fair skin, blond or red hair, and blue or green eyes.

Sunburn, especially during childhood and adolescence, is a significant risk factor for melanoma and other common skin cancers. It is also important to protect fair skin children from cumulative, long term exposure to UV radiation.