

Sept. 12, 2024

Shielding Our Kids: The Urgent Need for Sunscreen Policy Reform in New Jersey Schools

According to the [Skin Cancer Foundation](#), getting just five sunburns in your lifetime can more than double your risk of developing skin cancer. Sunscreen has been proven to prevent sunburn and even skin cancer. Yet here in New Jersey, we have restrictions on sunscreen in school that leave our children vulnerable and without the protection they need.

Together, we share—as a former nurse, mother, and member of the New Jersey Assembly, and as a dermatologic skin cancer surgeon and leader for the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association (ASDSA)—a commitment to change this by passing a SUNucate law in New Jersey, which would allow children to have access to and possess sunscreen in schools and camps. The current outdated policies restrict sunscreen use in schools and camps, and children need protection during the entire day, including recess, sports, and outside activities. Sunscreen, along with protective clothing and shade, are the most effective ways to protect children from the risk of getting skin cancer. With UV Awareness Month earlier this summer and the start of school, it is an important reminder that we must all do our part to protect our children’s skin, their largest organ, from skin cancer, a heartbreaking disease that is diagnosed in 1 in 5 Americans.

Ninety percent of skin cancer is preventable. Helping to reduce our children’s UV ray exposure, while instilling in them lifelong sun-safe habits, is one of the best things we can do to protect them. Studies consistently show the efficacy of reducing exposure at an early age with the use of sunscreen. One [study published in JAMA Dermatology](#) found regular use of a broad spectrum sunscreen with a high SPF factor during the first 18 years of life would reduce the lifetime incidence of non-melanoma skin cancer by 78%. With such compelling evidence, there is no reason we should not be prioritizing sun safety education and practices for our children.

Unfortunately, the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) classification of sunscreen as an over-the-counter drug has made it hard for students to bring sunscreen into a school. While we all want our children to have good memories from recess or on class field trips, there is no reason that these memories need to come at the expense of their long-term health. Sunscreen and other protective measures should be readily available to them at school and camp.

Together, we are hoping to make New Jersey the 30th jurisdiction to pass [SUNucate legislation](#) that would allow children in the state of New Jersey to bring and use sunscreen in school and camp daily. This commonsense measure allowing direct access to sunscreen in schools has already been adopted by 28 states and the District of Columbia. By removing unnecessary barriers, we can ensure all children can protect themselves from harmful rays and develop life-long sun safe habits while enjoying the outdoors more safely.

We all want to do what is best for the health and well-being of our children, so let us not have another school year go by without passing this piece of reasonable and bipartisan legislation that will work to ensure our children do not become another statistic.

Authors:

Assemblywoman Nancy F. Muñoz
Summit, NJ

Seth L. Matarasso, MD
President, American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association (ASDSA)
San Francisco, CA

Contact:
(908) 918-0414
aswmunoz@njleg.org