

Children and Young People Committee

CYP(4)–10–12 Paper 1

Inquiry into school sun protection policy

Evidence from Tenovus

Each year over 10,000 people in the UK are diagnosed with malignant melanoma, the most dangerous and potentially lethal form of skin cancer. In Wales alone there are around 500 cases each year with over 100 deaths.

The rise in the incidence of malignant melanoma is truly alarming. In Wales, between 1999 and 2009 the number of cases in both men and women has more than doubled and this trend shows no sign of abating¹.

Tenovus are particularly concerned about young people as research has shown that sunburn in childhood can double the risk of getting skin cancer later in life and a recent survey carried out by the Teenage Cancer Trust showed that nearly a third of teenagers never use sunscreen and a quarter will actually try to burn on purpose².

Therefore, in 2010 as part of our sun awareness campaign *Here Comes the Sun*, we launched a petition calling for the Welsh Government to provide free sunscreen for children under the age of 11 in Wales. However, we fully recognise that such provision would only be one aspect of what needs to be a holistic approach to sun protection.

Currently there are a number of initiatives in schools that support teachers in providing sun awareness messaging and guidance to their pupils. For example the Healthy Schools Initiative, which we are pleased to see is now being extended into pre-school settings. However our understanding is that currently sun safety is not a requisite topic and only one of a number of healthy living areas that a school may focus on.

There have also been some excellent examples of resources produced by individual local authorities to support schools such as the *Sun Protection Guidelines for Early Years and Childcare Settings* in Caerphilly County Borough. However again these guidelines are not mandatory and very much depend on the buy in of individual schools.

Therefore, whilst policies and guidelines exist, as far as we are aware there is no specific monitoring of which schools have implemented them and how effective they have been in raising awareness of sun safety amongst their pupils. There also needs to be an audit of schools to determine what measures they have already implemented to ensure that their pupils are not being exposed to potentially dangerous levels of UV in their breaks and

lunchtimes. This will not only highlight which areas of sun protection need better provision in our schools but could also uncover models of best practice that are already being implemented in individual schools or Local Education Authorities.

A number of models of best practice already exist globally where their sun awareness policies are much more advanced in the education system. For example, in Australia where skin cancer rates have historically reached epidemic proportions, there are UV policy documents that provide advice on how to take a whole school approach to sun safety. This includes guidance on the provision of shade, appropriate hats and clothing, the timing of outdoor events, training of staff and sunscreen provision. In fact some schools in Australia currently provide broad spectrum, water resistant sunscreen for free to pupils and staff.

They also provide guidance on when the guidance does not need to be followed to ensure that they pupils receive sufficient Vitamin D outside of the summer months when the UV index is at a sufficiently safe level³.

Whilst there are obviously difficult financial pressures in Wales at the moment there is no doubt that prevention is always cheaper than cure. A recent study in England showed that the cost of skin cancer was around £240 million per year⁴. If you extrapolate this to Wales then skin cancer costs our health and social care system an estimated £14 million per year.

Research has also shown that the use of sunscreen is highly cost effective in preventing non malignant and premalignant skin cancers which, whilst not as life threatening as malignant skin cancer, still require treatment which will have cost implications as well as quality of life issues for the individual treated⁵.

There would also be opportunities to make huge cost savings through the purchasing power of the Welsh Government in relation to the provision of sunscreen. Recent research carried out by Tenovus and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health identified that if a family with two adults and two children applied the correct amounts of sunscreen at the appropriate intervals then it would cost them £60.84 for a week's supply⁶. However, sunscreen itself costs very little to manufacture with a large chunk cost spent on marketing and individual bottling.

Providing free sunscreen in schools should therefore be considered as one aspect of a comprehensive whole-school approach that is coordinated and monitored as a pan Wales initiative. There must also be a greater investment in the wider issue of sun awareness in Wales. Currently the Welsh Government invests approximately £20k promoting sun safety through the CRUK SunSmart campaign. We feel that this is extremely small investment considering the current costs of treating and supporting people with skin cancer each year in Wales. We also feel that more work needs to be done in the community and in more engaging and relevant ways.

Each summer, Tenovus runs an annual summer long campaign called *Here Comes the Sun* which promotes sun safety messages across the whole of Wales through the use of social media, an online schools package for primary and secondary school children and a sun awareness Ice Cream van which attended more than 40 outdoor events last year alone taking the message to people right at the heart of the community.

Tenovus is delighted that this petition is being debated in the context of the wider issue of sun protection for children and young people and would be really keen to work with the Welsh Government to provide them with a safer and healthier future.

1. Cancer in Wales, 1995–2009: A Comprehensive Report (2011) Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit
2. Nation Institute of Clinical Excellence, Skin cancer: prevention using public information, sun protection resources and changes to the environment, 2011 Shunburn, Love the sun, respect your skin!
3. SunSmart–In early childhood education and child services
<http://www.sunsmart.com.au>
4. Morris, S and Cox, B and Bosanquet, N (2009) Cost of skin cancer in England. Eur J Health Econ, 10 (3) 267 – 273
5. Gordon LG, Scuffham PA, van der Pols JC, McBride P, Williams GM, Green AC (2009). Regular sunscreen use is a cost-effective approach to skin cancer prevention in subtropical settings. J Invest Dermatol Dec;129(12):2766–71.
6. Barratt J A, Davies C J, Jenkins M, Lewis I, West Rh W. (2010) The effect of behaviour and beliefs on the effective use of sunscreen. Journal of Environmental Health Research, Volume 10, Issue 1, pp65–71