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Lynne Neagle MS, Cabinet Secretary for Education
Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs
Eluned Morgan MS, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
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Dear Ms Neagle, Mr Irranca-Davies, and Ms Morgan,

Skin cancer prevention is an area that cuts across climate, health and education. And it's a problem that's not going away.

Latest figures published by Public Health Wales show that skin cancer, including both melanoma and non-melanoma, accounted for 46 per cent of all cancers in Wales in 2019. Rates are increasing by approximately 8% a year. And perhaps most strikingly, the UK population now has at least a 1 in 5 chance of developing the disease. Unfortunately, climate change will continue to worsen the issue, with increased temperatures associated with increased time spent outdoors without protective clothing.

However, there is good news: the majority of skin cancers can be prevented with safer behaviours in the sun. Children, especially, should take extra care as severe sunburn as a youngster more than doubles the chance of developing skin cancer later on.

The World Health Organisation recommends sun safety in schools as the cornerstone to skin cancer prevention. In England in 2020, schools' physical health and mental wellbeing statutory guidance was amended to require that pupils at the end of primary school (Year 6) know about safe and unsafe sun exposure, and how to reduce the risk of sun damage, including skin cancer.



In Wales as you may know, sun safety is recommended as part of Public Health Wales' Welsh Network for Healthy Schools Scheme, but this is not enforced.

Back in 2012, the National Assembly's Children and Young People's Committee ran an inquiry into sun protection in schools with several recommendations, including:

Recommendation: As part of schools' broader health and safety policy, they should be required to have a document which sets out the school's approach to a range of environmental factors which might affect children during the school day, including sun protection and shade requirements, and wet or cold weather.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given to the equipment provided to, and the school uniform requirements for, children in the Foundation Phase to ensure that they are suitably protected to be outside in a range of weather conditions.

Recommendation: The Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association, schools and third sector organisations should continue to work together to deliver sun protection education to children.

Twelve years on, our current Health and Care Research Wales funded study [Sunproofed](#), shows that these recommendations have not been upheld.

In summer 2022, we conducted a survey of all primary schools in Wales and found:

- Only 39% of responding schools had a sun safety policy and of these only 82% enforced their policies.
- Schools with higher percentages of children on free school meals were less likely to have a policy, whereas schools in North Wales or those who taught in Welsh were more likely.
- Only 29% of schools teach sun safety as part of the curriculum in every year group.
- Only 5% of schools had sufficient shade for most active outdoor pursuits
- Only 8% of school include sun protective hats as part of the school uniform.

Please see our recent article for more information and results: [Why schools need to take sun safety more seriously – expert explains \(theconversation.com\)](#)

What's particularly concerning is that we know that sun safety risks factors are frequently linked to health inequalities: those living in areas of greater deprivation and/or from lower socio-economic groups have more limited sun protection knowledge, show riskier sun behaviours, and experience disproportionately high melanoma mortality rates. There is also limited awareness of skin cancer within some



Black African and Black Caribbean communities, leading to late diagnosis and concomitantly high melanoma mortality rates in ethnic minority patients.

Enforcing both the education of sun safety in schools and the need for a formal sun safety policy are ways in which we can move towards empowering all members of the population to improve their behaviours, with the ultimate aim of reducing future skin cancer in Wales. There is an important role Welsh Government can play to protect our future generations from a changing climate, but our research demonstrates that we're currently underprepared.

We are writing to ask you to consider a joint statement on how you will uphold the 2012 National Assembly's Children and Young People's Committee's recommendations with respect to sun safety in Wales.

We would also be happy to provide you with more information about our research.

Yours sincerely,

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cc: Buffy Williams, MS, Chair of The Children, Young People and Education
Committee
Sioned Williams, MS, Plaid Cymru