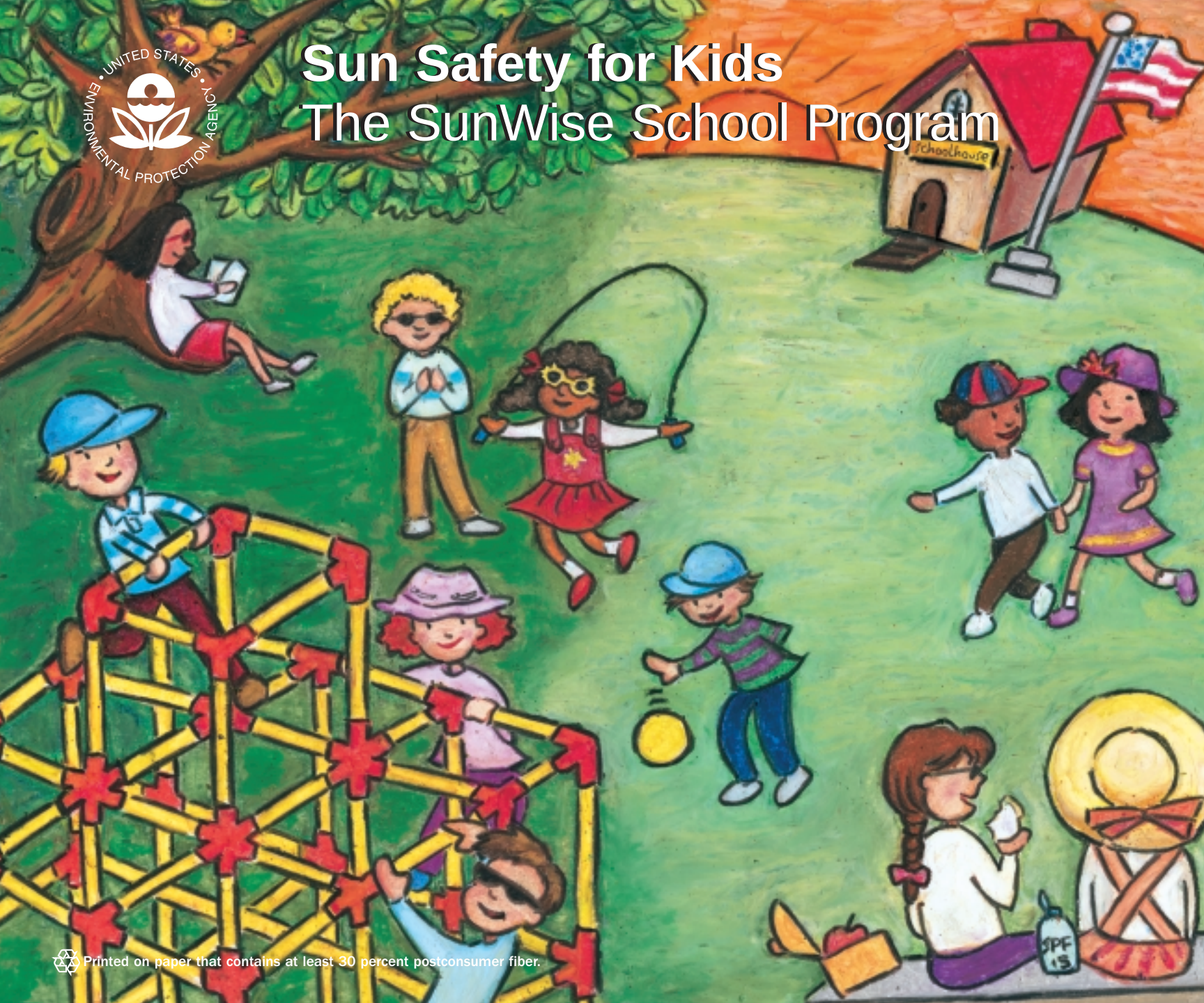
Sun Safety for Kids
The SunWise School Program



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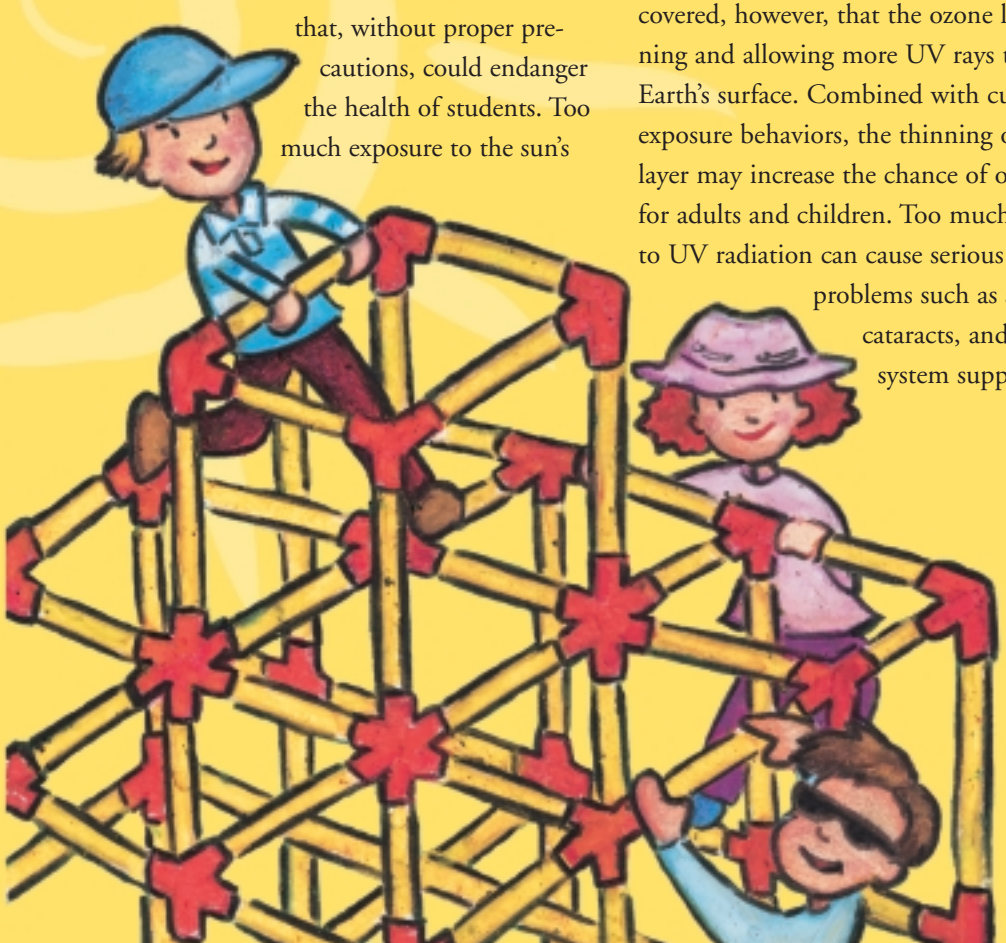
The Sun, UV, and You

Day after day, as school bells echo through the hallways, millions of kids across the nation stream out of their classrooms and into sun-filled school yards, playgrounds, and sports fields. While this is a familiar childhood scene, it also is one that, without proper precautions, could endanger the health of students. Too much exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can be harmful to anyone's health—particularly that of a child.

In the atmosphere, the ozone layer forms a shield that protects the Earth from the sun's powerful UV radiation. Scientists have discovered, however, that the ozone layer is thinning and allowing more UV rays to reach the Earth's surface. Combined with current sun exposure behaviors, the thinning of the ozone layer may increase the chance of overexposure for adults and children. Too much exposure to UV radiation can cause serious health problems such as skin cancer, cataracts, and immune system suppression.



EPA's SunWise School Program

To promote sun-safe behavior at an early age, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed the SunWise School Program, a national environmental and health education program for children. Through the use of classroom, school, and community components, SunWise promotes sun safety by teaching children and their caregivers how to protect themselves from overexposure to UV radiation.

The SunWise School Program builds upon traditional and innovative health and science practices already used by U.S. elementary and middle schools, focusing on simple steps students and teachers can take to prevent overexposure to the sun. While SunWise students learn about the environmental concepts related to sun protection, they also develop the ability to practice sustained health-enhancing behaviors.

SunWise was developed in cooperation with schools and educators. Providing maximum flexibility, the program's elements can be used as stand-alone teaching tools or as supplements to existing school activities. The time commitment necessary to take part in SunWise is minimal, while the potential payoff is enormous.

Protecting the Children

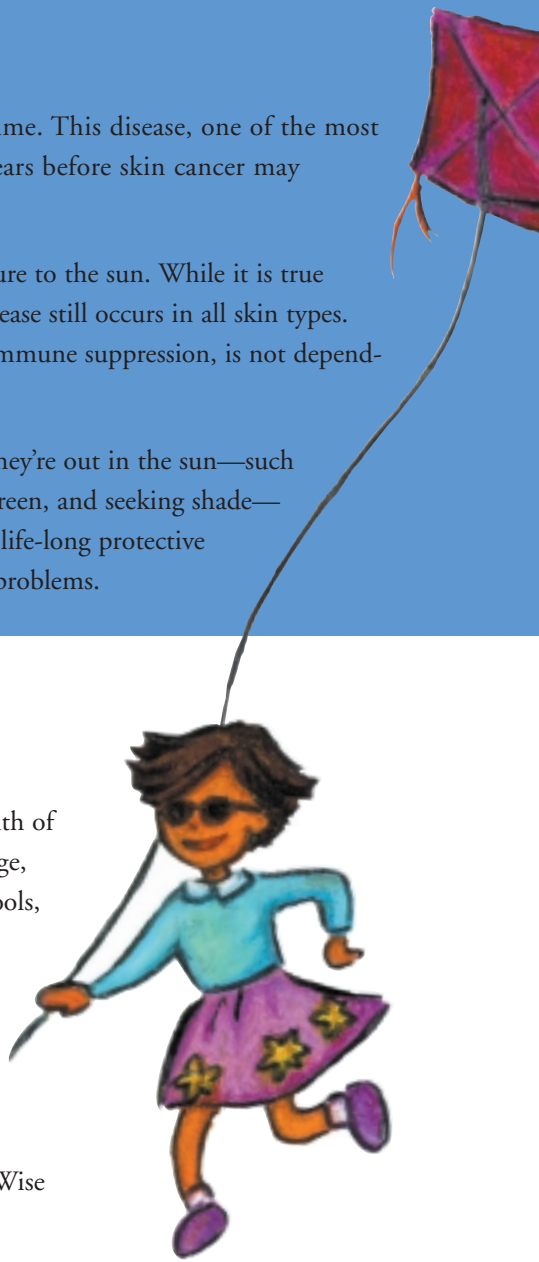
One in every five Americans will develop some form of skin cancer during their lifetime. This disease, one of the most serious UV-related health effects, can begin with a simple sunburn that happens years before skin cancer may develop.

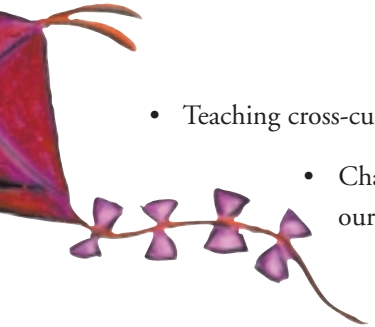
It is important to remember that children of all skin types need to be protected from overexposure to the sun. While it is true that the incidence of skin cancer is lower in dark-skinned individuals, the disease still occurs in all skin types. The risk of other UV-related health effects, such as eye damage and immune suppression, is not dependent upon skin type, and all children must be protected.

By teaching children to take some basic precautions when they're out in the sun—such as wearing protective clothing and sunglasses, using sunscreen, and seeking shade—teachers, nurses, parents, and other caregivers can instill life-long protective habits that reduce the risk of future UV-related health problems.

Becoming SunWise

SunWise is a fun and easy way to protect the health of children. Any school can participate free of charge, from single or multiple classrooms to entire schools, or even school districts. The program is designed for kindergarten through eighth-grade, with specific age-appropriate materials available for all learning levels. A random sample of participants will be asked to complete the *SunWise Student Survey* before and after implementing at least one of a range of SunWise activities. Following are some of the activities that SunWise schools can choose to undertake:





- Teaching cross-curricular classroom lessons and activities.
- Chart, graph, and map UV measurements on our Internet Learning Site.
- Holding schoolwide sun safety events and assemblies.
- Improving school policies and structural designs to reduce students' exposure to the most intense UV rays and provide more shade structures on school grounds.
- Reaching out to the community by forming partnerships with local businesses and organizations or by hosting guest speakers.

Equipped to Be SunWise

By joining EPA's SunWise School Program, participants will have access to the following useful tools to help teach sun-safe behaviors in the classroom:

- *SunWise Tool Kit*–includes cross-curricular, standards-based lessons designed for kindergarten through eighth-grade learning levels and features a range of activities and background information. Schools also will receive tools to help implement sun safety school policies, events, structural changes, and community partnerships.
- *The SunWise Internet Learning Site and UV Database*–is an interactive medium where students can report and interpret the daily UV Index and link to additional Web-based educational activities and resources.
- *Additional Materials*–video, posters, incentives, Web-based activities, and more.

Use the UV Index

Checking out television, radio, newspaper, and Internet weather forecasts in many cities across the country can now give you access to a powerful sun safety tool—the UV Index. The UV Index assigns a number to the next day's likely UV radiation levels and categorizes the level of exposure risk for people who plan to be outdoors.

The National Weather Service (NWS) calculates the UV Index so that the public can schedule outdoor activities to avoid dangerous overexposure to the sun. You can find the daily, ZIP code-searchable UV Index on the SunWise Web site at <www.epa.gov/sunwise>. The UV Index predicts UV radiation levels on a 0 to 10+ scale in the following way:

Index Number	Exposure Level
0-2	Minimal
3-4	Low
5-6	Moderate
7-9	High
10+	Very High

While it is always important to take precautions against overexposure to the sun, both children and adults should take particular care to practice sun-safe behaviors when the UV Index is moderate or higher. Watch for changes to the UV Index in 2004.

Take Action

Protect yourself and your children from overexposure to UV radiation. Taking the simple precautions listed below can ensure you enjoy safe fun in the sun.

Limit time in the midday sun as much as possible. The sun's UV rays are strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. To the extent you can, limit exposure to sun during those hours.

Watch for the UV Index. Always take precautions against overexposure, but take special care to adopt sun safety practices when the UV Index is moderate or higher.

Put on sunglasses. Sunglasses that provide 99 to 100 percent UVA and UVB protection will greatly reduce eye damage from sun exposure.

Wear a hat. A hat with a wide brim offers good sun protection for your eyes, ears, face, and the back of your neck.

Seek shade. Staying under cover or indoors is one of the best ways to protect yourself from the sun.

Protect other areas of your body with clothing. Wearing tightly-woven, loose-fitting, and full-length clothing is a good way to protect your skin from harmful UV rays.

Always use sunscreen. Apply a sunscreen with a sun protection factor of 15 or higher liberally, and reapply every 2 hours or after working, swimming, playing, or exercising outdoors. Consult your doctor about sunscreen use for children under 6 months.

Avoid sunlamps and tanning salons. The light source from sunbeds and sunlamps can damage the skin and unprotected eyes.

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SunWise
a school program that **radiates** good ideas