

# WHO INFORMATION SERIES ON SCHOOL HEALTH DOCUMENT SEVEN

## Sun Protection: An Essential Element of Health-Promoting Schools

The development of this document is a joint effort of the Department of Noncommunicable Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and the Department of Protection of the Human Environment.

This document is jointly published with UNESCO, Division for the Promotion of Quality Education, which is working with WHO to promote health through schools worldwide.

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*This document is dedicated  
to the memory of*

***Herbert Loeb Friedman***

*who contributed  
significantly to the health  
and development of  
adolescents*

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## Foreword

Investments in schools are intended to yield benefits to communities, nations and individuals. Such benefits include improved social and economic development, increased productivity and enhanced quality of life. In many parts of the world, such investments are not achieving their full potential, despite increased enrolments and hard work by committed teachers and administrators. This document describes how the results of educational investments can be enhanced, by increasing the capacity of schools to promote health as they do learning.

For better or worse, health influences education. If children are healthy, they can take full advantage of every opportunity to learn. But, children who cannot attend school because of poor health or unhealthy conditions cannot seize the opportunities that schools provide. Similarly, schools cannot achieve their full potential if children who attend school are not capable of learning well. Poor health and unhealthy conditions jeopardize the value of school attendance. But education can also help promote healthy attitudes and behaviour, through carefully designed school health programmes. In this respect, health is not only a condition required for teaching and learning, but also an outcome of quality education. School health must therefore be a key element in efforts to achieve Education for All (EFA), and health must be high on the agenda of the education sector at all levels.

Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun is of considerable public health concern, and plays an important role in the development of skin cancer and cataracts, and suppresses the immune system. Children are particularly at risk as (i) sun exposure during childhood appears to set the stage for the development of skin cancer, (ii) a majority of a person's lifetime exposure occurs before age 18, and (iii) because children have more time to develop diseases with long latency, more years of life to be lost and more suffering to be endured as a result of impaired health. Prevention efforts in schools to change children's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour regarding sun protection can significantly decrease adverse health effects and health care costs.

This document is part of the WHO Information Series on School Health prepared for WHO's Global School Health Initiative. The Initiative is a concerted effort by international organizations to help schools improve the health of students, staff, parents and community members. Although definitions will vary, depending on need and circumstances, a Health-Promoting School can be characterized as a school constantly strengthening its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working.

The extent to which each nation's schools become Health-Promoting Schools will play a significant role in determining whether the next generation is educated and healthy. Education and health support and enhance each other. Neither is possible alone.



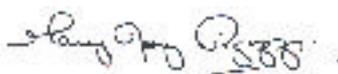
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## **Health-Promoting School**

A Health-Promoting School:

- Fosters health and learning with all the measures at its disposal
- Engages health and education officials, teachers, students, parents and community leaders in efforts to promote health
- Strives to provide a healthy environment, school health education, and school health services along with school/community projects and outreach, health promotion programmes for staff, nutrition and food safety programmes, opportunities for physical education and recreation, and programmes for counseling, social support and mental health promotion
- Implements policies, practices and other measures that respect an individual's self-esteem, provide multiple opportunities for success, and acknowledge good efforts and intentions as well as personal achievements
- Strives to improve the health of school personnel, families and community members as well as students; and works with community leaders to help them understand how the community contributes to health and education

## **FRESH Initiative**

At the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, April 2000, WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank launched an initiative to work together to Focus Resources on Effective School Health (FRESH Initiative). In doing so, they are helping schools provide a living and learning environment that is friendly and welcoming to children, healthy for children, effective with children, and protective of children.

Education and health agencies are encouraged to use this document in support of the FRESH Initiative by implementing school health policies, improvements in the school environment, skills based health education and school health services to reduce exposure of students, school personnel, families and community members to the harmful effects of the sun.

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