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Sunscreen use in schools: A content analysis of US state laws

Ravi R. Patel, MD^a and Dawn M. Holman, MPH^b

^aGwinnett Medical Center, Lawrenceville, Georgia

^bCenters for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Cancer Prevention and Control, Atlanta, Georgia

To the Editor

Sunscreen use is well recognized as an effective strategy for reducing risk of sunburn, photoaging, and skin cancer.^{1–3} The US Food and Drug Administration regulates sunscreen as an over-the-counter drug product. In some states, students' ability to carry or use US Food and Drug Administration–regulated over-the-counter drug products of any kind while on school property is restricted, unintentionally creating barriers to adequate sun protection for students. Realizing this concern, major medical associations have called on schools to allow sunscreen use,⁴ and some states have passed legislation granting students the ability to carry and self-apply sunscreen while at school. We conducted a content analysis of this state legislation.

We entered the search term *sunscreen* into the official legislative databases of all 50 US states to identify those with laws in place related to sunscreen use in schools as of December 1, 2017. We developed a coding schema to describe and quantify the content of the state laws, and each author coded the content. Minor coding discrepancies were resolved by reviewing and discussing the exact wording of the laws.

Table I lists the laws in chronologic order based on when they were passed. Table II reflects our final coding schema and describes the content of these laws. Of the 11 states that have enacted legislation allowing students to carry and self-apply sunscreen at school, 7 passed legislation in 2017. Most laws included a definition for sunscreen, but definitions varied across states. With regard to setting, some laws spoke of schools generally, whereas others specifically mentioned public (n = 6), private (n = 3), and/or charter schools (n = 1). Some also addressed sunscreen use at school events (n = 8), at summer camps (n = 3), on school buses (n = 1), and while under the supervision of school personnel (n = 1).

Reprint requests: Ravi R. Patel, MD, Gwinnett Medical Center, 1000 Medical Center Blvd, Lawrenceville, GA 30046, rapatel@gwinnetmedicalcenter.org.

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None of the laws required a physician's note or prescription. However, 1 required parental consent, another stated that school district policies may require parental consent, and yet another noted that the sunscreen must be supplied by a parent or guardian.

Six of the laws granted employees and volunteers permission to assist in sunscreen application with parental/guardian consent, 1 granted permission "in accordance with school district policy," and another gave permission without mentioning additional requirements. Four of the laws specified that school personnel were not required to assist students in applying sunscreen, and another 4 included language granting school personnel immunity from civil liability in regard to adverse sequelae of application or discontinuation of sunscreen.

Two laws granted students permission to use sun-protective clothing, including hats, at school, and 1 law encouraged schools to educate students about sun safety guidelines.

Our analysis demonstrates the attention that sun-screen use in schools has gained among legislators and may guide future policy by highlighting key content and opportunities for comprehensive sun safety practices in schools. Future research could explore the impact of these laws and potential benefits of implementing them in conjunction with other school sun safety practices.⁵ Dermatologists can play an integral role in the guidance of future legislation by continuing to educate their patients, communities, and decision makers.

References

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Table I

State laws regarding sunscreen use at schools listed in chronologic order

State	Bill	Date passed
California	SB 1632	August 24, 2002
New York	S595A	July 31, 2013
Oregon	HB 3041	May 26, 2015
Texas	SB 625	June 19, 2015
Utah	HB 288	March 21, 2017
Arizona	HB 2134	April 26, 2017
Alabama	SB 63	May 3, 2017
Washington	SB 404	May 4, 2017
Florida	HB 7069	June 16, 2017
Louisiana	HB 412	June 22, 2017
Ohio	HB 49	June 29, 2017

HB, House Bill; *SB*, Senate Bill.

Table II

Characteristics of state laws regarding sunscreen use in schools (N = 11 state laws)

Characteristic	n
Includes a definition of sunscreen	
Yes	7
No	4
Language included in the definition of sunscreen (categories not mutually exclusive)	
Product is approved/regulated by the FDA for nonprescription/over-the-counter use for the purpose of limiting skin damage induced by UV light/avoiding overexposure to the sun	4
A compound topically applied to prevent sunburn	4
Not for medical treatment of an injury or illness	2
Types of schools mentioned (categories not mutually exclusive)	
Public schools	6
Private/nonpublic schools	3
Charter schools	1
Does not specify beyond "school"	5
Settings and scenarios specifically mentioned (categories not mutually exclusive)	
At school	11
At a school-sponsored, school-based, or school- related event or activity	8
Children's camp or summer camp	3
On a school bus	1
While under the supervision of school personnel	1
Parental consent required for students to possess and self-apply sunscreen at school	
Yes	1
No	2
School district policies may require parental consent	1
Not specified	7
Physician's note or prescription required for students to possess and self-apply sunscreen at school	
No	8
Not specified	3
Employees and volunteers allowed to assist in topical application	
Yes (but parental/guardian consent needed)	6
Yes (in accordance with school district policy)	1
Yes (does not mention a requirement for parental/ guardian consent)	1
Not specified	3
School personnel not required to assist students in applying sunscreen	
Yes	4
Not specified	7
School personnel not to be held liable/immunity from civil liability	
Yes	4
Not specified	7
Outdoor use of sun-protective clothing (including hats) allowed	
Yes	2

Characteristic	n
Not specified	9
Schools encouraged to educate students about sun safety guidelines	
Yes	1
Not specified	10

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