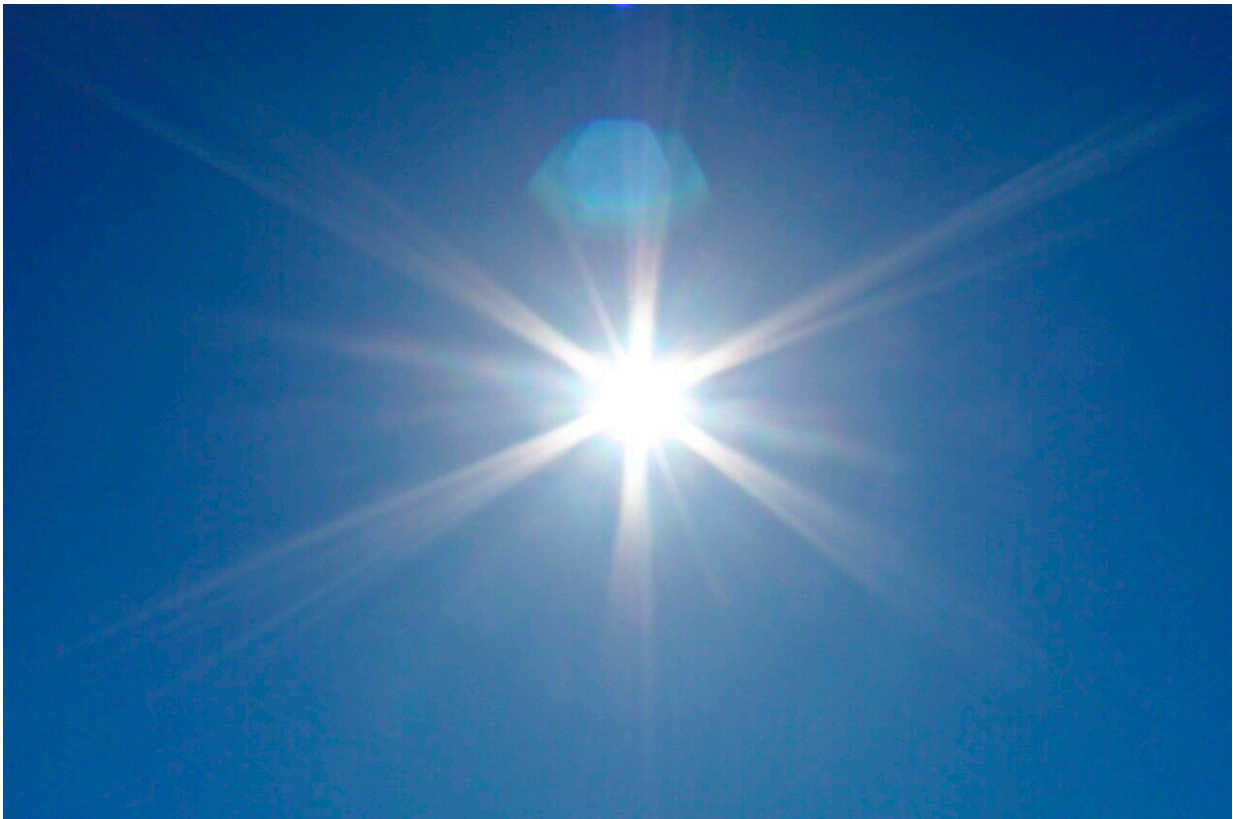


New research will explore the role of Welsh primary schools in preventing skin cancer

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With skin cancer rates rising, much of it preventable, a new research project led by Swansea University—called Sunproofed—is to explore the role of primary schools in Wales and assess the effectiveness of sun safety policies in protecting children. The results will help improve prevention of skin cancer in Wales and beyond. Credit: Swansea University

With the skin cancer rate rising, much of it preventable, a new research project is set to explore the role of primary schools in Wales and assess the effectiveness of sun safety policies in protecting children. The results will help improve prevention of skin cancer in Wales and beyond.

Skin cancer now accounts for half of all cancers in England and Wales, with Wales seeing a 79.6% rise in [melanoma](#) cases (one of two types of skin cancer) between 2002 and 2018. However, with melanoma, 86% of cases can be prevented through less exposure to the sun's ultra-violet radiation.

Studies show that [children](#) who are badly sunburned are more likely to develop melanoma skin cancer when they are older. Children spend almost half their time at [school](#) often playing and learning outdoors, so one crucial way to prevent skin cancer is to teach children at school how to protect themselves from the sun.

Teaching sun safety is currently left to schools' discretion in Wales. Some have a sun safety policy, which sets out how they will teach children about the subject, and what steps the school will take, for example on providing shade or helping to apply sunscreen.

The Swansea-led research team will examine what is currently being taught in Welsh schools about sun safety and what influence this has on the knowledge and behavior of children, teachers, staff and school managers.

The project—called Sunproofed—involves experts from the Trials Unit at Swansea University Medical School, data experts from Swansea's SAIL Databank, and NHS colleagues from Cardiff and Vale University Health Board.

The project will see the team:

- Send out a questionnaire to all [primary schools](#) in Wales to learn whether they have a sun safety policy in place and to identify what support schools need in this area
- Evaluate NHS data on serious sunburn in children, using anonymized health records held by Swansea University's SAIL Databank, to see what it reveals about the impact of sun safety policies
- Visit five schools—some with and some without a sun safety policy—to speak to children, parents, school staff and governors to find out what they know about sun safety
- Publish guidance for schools on the best way to implement a [sun safety](#) policy, working with school communities and experts in education and skin cancer
- Share findings with education and health leaders and publish them for fellow researchers to see

Dr. Julie Peconi of Swansea University Medical School, lead researcher for the Sunproofed project, said, "Rates of skin cancer are increasing in Wales, adding to the strain on already limited NHS resources. There is strong evidence that reducing sun exposure in children can help prevent skin [cancer](#) in later life, so an urgent shift from treatment to prevention is needed.

"Education in schools can be a crucial way to achieve this. Our study is an essential first step, as it will give us a picture of the current situation in Wales and what can be done to improve it.

"One of the outcomes of our study will be for participants to work together to write an action plan for schools. This will help schools to start using sun safe policies, keeping more children safe from [skin cancer](#) in later life."

More information: Julie Peconi et al, Sunproofed study protocol: A

mixed-methods scoping study of sun safety policies in primary schools in Wales, *PLoS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0268141](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0268141)

Provided by Swansea University

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