

Program Casts New Light On Student Health

(NAPSA)—Schools across the country have focussed their attention on a burning children’s health issue—sun overexposure.

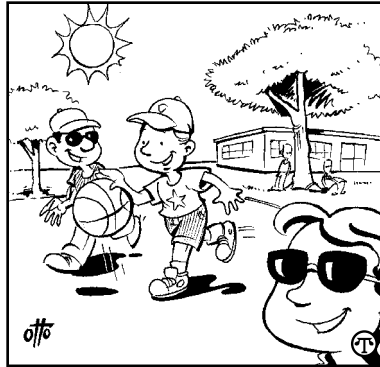
Doctors say the amount of time the average school-aged child spends outdoors can put him or her at particular risk of being overexposed to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. In fact, the American Academy of Dermatology says that between recess, physical education classes, after school programs and sports activities, today’s average young person receives most of his or her lifetime exposure to the sun before they turn 18.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), overexposure to the sun can cause serious health effects—including skin cancer, eye disorders and immune system suppression. Currently, one in five Americans develops skin cancer in their lifetime and it is estimated that one person dies from the disease every hour.

To combat negative effects of the sun, the EPA developed a free environmental and health education program geared towards teaching children in grades K-8 and their care givers how to protect themselves from overexposure to UV radiation.

The program, called SunWise, emphasizes the importance of behaviors that can reduce UV-related health effects posed by the sun and seeks to develop an understanding in students of the environmental concepts that make sun protection so important.

Proponents of the program say it builds on traditional teaching methods, and can be easily inte-



A new program in schools teaches students about the importance of avoiding overexposure to the sun.

grated into existing curriculum, helping to make it user-friendly and effective.

“We recognize that teachers and school nurses already have full plates,” says Linda Rutsch, acting director of SunWise. “That’s why we designed the program to be flexible. We feel that even a minimal time commitment will have a high payoff in the future—in lower skin cancer rates and other health benefits.”

In addition to education, the program emphasizes practical steps that schools can take to protect students from overexposure to the sun. The initiative encourages schools to provide a “sun-safe” infrastructure that includes shade and policies such as the use of hats, sunscreen and sunglasses.

Experts say the program may lead to a brighter, healthier future for the nation’s children.

For more information, contact Linda Rutsch at (202) 564-2261 or visit www.epa.gov/sunwise.