

Children and Young People Committee

SSPP02

Inquiry into school sun protection policy

Evidence from Michael Ball

I wish to write in protest at the idea of imposition of sun screen on children in schools. While I am aware that children's skin is more sensitive than adult, and that suffering burning is dangerous, there is an opposite view to take into account.

Much of the rise in skin cancers is probably due to the use of sunbeds, and to "Binge" sunbathing during Mediterranean, Florida, Thailand, Australian holidays, where we have not evolved to cope with the strength of the sun.

There is much evidence that people whose skin is regularly exposed to the sun are not more prone to skin cancer than anyone else, e.g. outdoor workmen and practising naturists.

There is growing evidence of rickets re-appearing among children, at least in part caused by the short times many of them spend outside and in some cases, neurotic mothers who smother them with high factor sunscreen all the time. Ethnic children who evolved to cope with stronger sun are more prone to this problem, especially girls who must remain covered for religious reasons.

Finally, the skin specialists have got the ear of the media, but other oncologists will tell you that on the other hand there is strong evidence that healthy exposure to the sun protects against many other cancers, including breast and bowel cancer, as well as reduce the likelihood of children being born who develop ms and other problems.

Vitamin D in its most useful form is made in skin on sensible exposure to sunlight. Vitamin D is not just a nutrient, but a key factor in the proper functioning of the human immune system, and schools should not help to spread irrational panic about sensible exposure to sunshine.

Michael Ball, grandfather and school governor