

More states allow sunscreen at schools without doctor's OK

May 14 2017, by Matt O'brien



In this Thursday, May 11, 2017 photo Susan Grenon, left, chats with her son Pauly, right, as their pet German Shepherd "Ginger," center, looks on in an entryway to their home, in Smithfield, R.I. Guenon makes sure her son is lathered with sunscreen before he leaves for school in the morning, but the red-headed 10-year-old can't bring a bottle to reapply it without a doctor's note. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

Susan Grenon makes sure her son is lathered with sunscreen before he

leaves for school in the morning, but the fair-skinned 10-year-old can't bring a bottle to reapply it without a doctor's note.

Many school systems categorize sunscreen as an over-the-counter medication requiring special paperwork, but several states have been pushing to loosen restrictions to make it easier for kids to protect themselves from skin cancer.

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, signed a bill into law this month allowing students to use sunscreen at school without notes from a doctor and parent. Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, a Republican, enacted a similar measure late last month, following Utah in March. Oregon, Texas and New York have also freed students to use sunscreen in recent years. California did it back in 2002.

Backed by the [personal care products](#) industry, such proposals also have wide and bipartisan support from health experts and state lawmakers. Legislation is moving forward this spring in Rhode Island and Louisiana. In Florida, it's waiting for the governor's signature. The main opposition has come from school nurses voicing caution about children bringing in lotions that can cause allergic reactions.

Grenon, who lives in Smithfield, Rhode Island, said her concerns for her son grew after a doctor excised two [basal cell carcinomas](#) from her face in February, and another one three years ago. Grenon said she is paying the price for never using sunscreen while growing up as a military kid in sunny climates such as Hawaii and Nevada.

"We burn within 10 to 15 minutes," she said of her family. "We're fair-skinned and redheads."

It's not just a Sun Belt problem. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has shown that some of the nation's highest rates of

melanoma—the deadliest form of skin cancer—are in northern regions, such as New England, the Pacific Northwest and Minnesota.



In this Thursday, May 11, 2017 photo Susan Grenon, left, plays with her son Pauly, right, in the backyard of their home, in Smithfield, R.I. Guenon makes sure her son is lathered with sunscreen before he leaves for school in the morning, but the red-headed 10-year-old can't bring a bottle to reapply it without a doctor's note. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

If he could apply it himself at school, "he probably wouldn't come home with sunburn," Grenon said of her son. "He's got a burn on the back of his neck on the collar line."

Democratic state Rep. David Bennett, who sponsored the Rhode Island bill, said making it so hard for children to apply sunscreen on themselves at school "sends kids a conflicting message about the very real danger of

unprotected sun exposure."

He said part of the problem is that schools are following the lead of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which regulates sunscreen as a medication. Rhode Island's proposal would exempt sunscreen from state rules banning students from using over-the-counter drugs at public schools without special permission.

There was little debate on Bennett's bill in the Rhode Island House of Representatives, which voted unanimously to pass it Tuesday and moved it on to the state Senate. But a statewide association of school nurses is raising objections.

Deborah Svitil, a school nurse in the city of Cranston who helps lead the group, said there's a danger of students bringing in sunscreen and sharing it with other students who are allergic to the fragrances and other substances found inside.

Svitil said sunscreen is important but she doesn't see what's so hard about a signed note faxed to her office. She also questioned how important it is for kids to put on [sunscreen](#) at [school](#), especially if their parents already applied some at home.

"In most cases, they do not have extended exposure times," Svitil said. "They're outside for recess, weather-dependent, but that would usually be maybe for 20 minutes or so."

Rhode Island last year enacted a law requiring elementary schools to give children at least 20 minutes of recess each day.

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