

Keeping Everyone Safe

Parent Information



Focus on Burns and Scalds

This information sheet is based on guidance from the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) regarding the risks from burns and scalds:

The National Burn Injury Database reveals that it is estimated that on average 110 children per day are seen in emergency departments with burn injuries – 46 as a result of a hot cup of tea or coffee spill.

In fact the most common place of injury for children is in the home – 49% of whom are burnt in the kitchen. The majority of burn injuries occurring to children are between 3pm and 6pm.

Most accidental burns and scalds injuries to children can easily be prevented. The key to prevention is understanding why young children are more at risk, and how these accidents can be prevented.

Why are Young Children at Greater Risk?

Let's start with an obvious one - they're small! For burns and scalds, this is a risk factor in its own right. A burn from hair straighteners (maybe up to 10cm in length) or a scald from a spilled hot drink will cover a larger surface area of a child's skin in proportion to its body than it will with an adult.

Babies and toddlers have thinner skin – up to 15 times thinner than that of an adult. This means that the injury is more severe. A small contact burn or scald can be a minor irritant to an adult, but it can be a serious injury for a young child.

They're inquisitive and developing fine motor skills – they're learning to reach and grab, and they don't discriminate! It could be a favourite toy, a cup of tea, pan handle or hair straighteners. Which brings us on to ... Reflexes. We assume they're automatic but they're not! If we, as adults, touch something hot, we move away from the heat source almost immediately and the contact lasts for just a split second. But young children have yet to learn to pull away and won't know that touching something hot will harm them.

Finally, you can tell a young child not to touch something and why, and the chances are they won't do it in that particular instance. However, they are still developing reliable memory and don't really understand the consequences (even if they say they do!), so what you've told them may not register.

Top tips for preventing burns and scalds accidents

Our top five essentials are:

1. Most injuries are caused by hot drinks. Keep hot drinks well out of reach of young children (they can be hot enough to cause a serious injury up to 15 minutes after they've been made).
2. Put cold water into a bath before hot. If possible, get a thermostatic mixing valve installed to regulate the temperature of the hot water.
3. Hair straighteners get as hot as an iron, and believe it or not – hot enough to cook bacon and eggs on!! Also, they can stay very hot for a while after they've been unplugged. When you've finished using them, put them well out of the reach of young children.
4. Hobs stay very hot even after they've been turned off, and oven doors can get very hot when the oven is on. So keep young children away from ovens when they're being used. A safety gate on the door to your kitchen can be invaluable in keeping toddlers out of harm's way.
5. Finally, as Summer is here, don't forget that barbecues can stay hot for a long time, even after you've finished using them. Keep young children away from them.

CAPT's resources include expert advice about the different stages of a child's development, and where the risks lie at each stage of development. CAPT's burns and scalds page for parents walks through each of the main dangers in the home

<https://www.capt.org.uk/burns-scalds-parents>

The Impact of Burns and Scalds

The injury caused by a burn or scald is incredibly painful. Treatment and rehabilitation can take a long time, skin grafts are very painful and distressing, and the fallout of a serious burn or scald – the trauma, time taken off work, the guilt – can affect the whole family. And of course, children can be physically scarred for life.