

Burns and Scalds

Many Australian children under 5 years of age come to hospital emergency departments each year for the treatment of burns and scalds.

About 1 in 4 of these children are admitted to hospital.

Severe Burns and Scalds

Of the young children admitted to hospital for burns and scalds, 1 in 5 are injured so severely that they need to be in hospital for at least a week.

Most children hospitalised for burns and scalds need repeat visits, and often, multiple operations.

How Scalds Happen

A scald is a burn injury caused by hot liquid, hot vapour or steam. For babies and young children, scalds are commonly associated with:



- Hot drinks



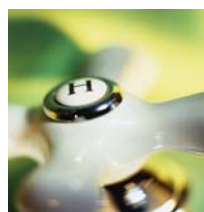
- Water being boiled for drinks



- Cooking and hot food

- Hot tap water

- Hot bath water



Callum's story

On a Saturday morning about 9 am, 14 month old Callum was playing in the backyard with his sister when his dad John started running a hot bath to soak in before he went to play football.

John went into the kitchen and was chatting to Callum's mum Nicki when they heard a noise, some sort of gasp.

They ran the three metres to the bathroom and found Callum sitting with one leg raised in about 5 cm of hot water. He had probably gone in headfirst and put out his hands, which turned him around.

Nicki pulled him out and jumped straight into the shower, stripping off his T-shirt and nappy. He was still not making any loud noise, but his skin came away in sheets.

After about 10 minutes cooling his burns, his parents bundled Callum into the car and rushed him the short ride to the hospital.

Callum was in the water for only about nine seconds. He was badly scalded over a quarter of his body, on one leg, the underside of his wrists, between his fingers and the tops of his feet (the soles were hardened and didn't scald), with splash scalds on his chest. He was in major pain and was flown to the capital city that night.

Callum was in the burns unit for seven weeks and had to learn to walk again. He wore pressure bandages and kept going back for treatment for a number of years.

When Nicki and John measured the temperature of their hot water they found it to be about 70°. Their new system has the temperature limited to the recommended 50°.

Hot Drink Scalds

Hot drink scalds usually involve a young child pulling a cup down on itself; pulling down on a tablecloth that causes a drink to fall; or running into or being held by someone who has a drink and spills it.

Injuries are usually to the head, face, chest and hands.

Hot drink scalds can happen quickly, often with adults nearby who do not realise a child is reaching for the hot drink until it is too late to stop them.

Children aged 1 to 2 years are most likely to be scalded in this way.

Hot Tap Water Scalds

The bathroom accounts the majority of hot tap water scalds.

Scalds are caused by hot water already in a bathtub, e.g. when a child falls or is placed into it, and when a child is in the bath and the hot water is turned on. Scalds can also occur in the shower and the hand basin.



Scalds in the Kitchen

Many scalds occur in and around the kitchen when younger children pull down hot items, or slightly older children try to “help”.

Electric kettles pulled by the cord, saucepans or cooking implements pulled by the handle, and plates of hot food on the table are often involved.

These scalds can involve relatively large amounts of very hot liquid falling onto the child’s head and upper body.

Microwave ovens are involved in a large number of scalding incidents. This is because microwave ovens heat unevenly and may contain ‘hot spots’ that will burn a child’s mouth.

Noodles

Spilling noodles heated in a microwave oven can cause burns to children.



Noodles are a great snack especially for school aged children when they have arrived home from school or playing sport or from just playing.

If a hot noodle attaches itself to the skin it will stick, making it hard to remove immediately. This allows the noodle to burn into the skin longer and deeper. If placed into a child’s mouth the same burn can occur.

Safe Practices

- Heat noodles ***under adult supervision***
- Ensure noodles are not overheated and never boiled
- When microwaving noodles, be careful of uneven heating of food
- Older children should be taught the correct use of the microwave oven or stove, under adult supervision
- Heated noodles should be removed carefully from the microwave oven or stove either by an adult or under adult supervision
- Noodles should be allowed to cool before given to a child or eaten

Baby Bottles

Microwave ovens used for heating babies’ or young children’s milk or food can cause scalds to the mouth that need extensive medical attention and may create permanent long term medical problems.



Safe Practices

According to NSW Health, breast milk and infant formula do not have to be warmed before feeding. Often, infants prefer to drink milk at room temperature.

The best and safest way to warm bottles is by standing the bottle in warm water. It is not recommended to heat bottles in the microwave oven..

Specially designed bottle warmers are also available. Test heated milk or water until it is warm to touch when sprinkled onto your wrist. While the bottle is warming remember to place the ***hot*** container in the sink or a safe place where children can access it.

Prevention

Young children love to explore, touch, climb and grab, but do not understand dangers like hot water or hot drinks. Here are some ways to keep them safe from burns and scalds:

Safety in the Kitchen

- Keep young children out of the kitchen or cooking areas during meal preparation.
- Keep kettles, jugs and teapots away from the edge of benches and tables.
- Use cordless kettles, curled cords or hook cords up to keep them from dangling within children's reach.
- Empty kettles immediately after use.
- Install a stove guard to prevent children pulling objects off the cook top.
- Use an oven guard to limit heat from oven door.
- Turn saucepan handles away from the stove-front. If possible, use the rear hot plates on the stove, rather than the front ones.
- Carry plates to the stove, rather than the saucepans to the plates.

Safety with Hot Tap Water

- Control the temperature of your bathroom hot tap water to a **maximum of 50°C**. This temperature is required for new homes under the plumbing code. Your licensed plumber can tell you how best to achieve this.
- Always test the water's temperature before bathing a child. Use the inside of your wrist. Hold it in the water for a slow count of five. It should be comfortably warm, not hot. Note: the maximum recommended temperature for bathing a baby is 38°C.
- When running a bath always run the cold water first (and turn it off last).
- Child resistant taps/tap covers can help, but won't stop a child falling into a bath that is already run.
- Always stay with children when they are in the bathroom. Take them with you if you have to leave the room. Avoid leaving younger children in the care of older children.
- Turn taps off, tightly, and keep the bathroom door closed when not in use.

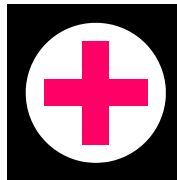
Safety with Hot Drinks

- **Keep hot drinks out of reach.** Place drinks up high, rather than on low tables. At the table, use non-slip place mats rather than tablecloths, and keep drinks toward the centre.
- Avoid feeding or cuddling your baby when having a hot drink. Take tea breaks when your toddler is resting or sleeping.
- Use a stable, broad-based mug.
- Avoid putting hot drinks in a cup your child usually drinks from, or allowing your child to sip from your hot drink.



General Prevention from burns and scalds around the home

- Prevent chemical burns by wearing gloves and other protective clothing when you handle chemicals. Store chemicals, including petrol, out of the reach of children.
- To prevent electrical burns, put covers on any electrical outlets that are within children's reach. Throw out electrical cords that are frayed or damaged in any way.
- Use space heaters carefully and teach children to stay away from them.
- Store matches and lighters in a locked cabinet or where children can't reach them.
- Never leave candles unattended. Blow them out when you leave the room.
- If you smoke, don't smoke in bed. Get rid of used cigarettes carefully. Fires caused by smoking materials are the leading cause of deaths in house fires.
- Before putting a child into a car seat, touch the seat to see how hot it is. Hot seat-belt straps or buckles can cause burns on small children. Cover the car seat with a towel when you park in the sun.
- Don't let small children play near the stove when it is in use.
- Don't wear clothing with long, loose sleeves when you are cooking.
- Cooking fires are the leading cause of house fires. Put out a small fire on a stove by sliding a lid over the flames.
- Do not use a microwave oven to warm baby bottles. The liquid may heat up unevenly and scald your baby's mouth.
- Cover electrical outlets to prevent electrical burns in babies, toddlers and small children.
- Unplug hot irons, such as clothes irons or curling irons, and keep them out of reach of children.



First Aid for Scalds

If your child is scalded, **every second counts.**

- Remove all wet clothing. Any wet clothing left on the child will keep burning and cause more damage. Leave clothing on if stuck to the skin.
- Run cold water over the burn for 30 minutes. Never use ice, oil or butter, soy sauce or ointments. These can damage the skin further.
- Keep the child warm with a clean blanket and comfort them. Seek medical advice.
- Seek immediate medical advice if the burn involves the face or hands, is larger than the child's palm, or if blistering appears or scald is inside the mouth.

***In an emergency dial 000
for an ambulance.***

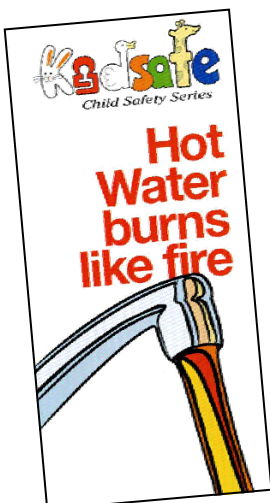
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For more information visit the Children's Hospital at Westmead website—
chw.edu.au

Kidsafe NSW has a brochure available titled—
Hot Water burns like fire.

To order a copy, contact the office 02 9845 0890.

Kidsafe NSW

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child safety is no accident