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Rise in burns to children puts heat on modern home

Most parents think of electrical sockets and irons when asked about dangers to young children in the home but, unknown to parents, new and unexpected risks from modern home gadgets such as hair straighteners are posing a growing threat to toddlers' safety.

While overall accident rates have started to decline¹, figures highlighted today by the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) show a 50 per cent rise² in the number of under fives admitted to hospital due to contact burns over the last ten years. With the growing popularity of hair straighteners, hospitals are treating increasing numbers of children with serious burns.

Hair straighteners can reach temperatures of 220° C, so can burn children as badly as an iron. They can also still burn children up to eight minutes after they have been unplugged. As young children's skin is fifteen times thinner than an adult's, burns from hair straighteners can cause permanent scarring.³

Sian Falder, Consultant Plastic Surgeon at Alder Hey Children's Hospital has seen first-hand the impact on toddlers of this growing trend: "We are seeing more and more children with severe burns to their feet, mouth and hands due to hair straightener injuries. On average, we see 44 children a year who need extensive treatment to repair their injuries. It is becoming a major area of concern for us, as parents just aren't as aware of these items as posing a threat."

A poll by online mums' portal, NetMums, commissioned by CAPT to mark the launch of Child Safety Week (Monday 22 to Sunday 28 June), showed many mums are unaware of the threats from modern day home hazards. Topping the list of their concerns were electrical sockets – which due to legislation do not pose a significant threat to young children⁴ – with almost one in five mums feeling their child was at risk of being hurt. In contrast, only one in 15 worried about hair straighteners.

Katrina Phillips, Chief Executive of the Child Accident Prevention Trust, says:

“With the rapid pace of modern life and the speed at which children develop, it can be a challenge for parents to stay one step ahead in preventing serious accidents.

“It's often the small changes that make all the difference. The trick is to make them a habit – like putting your straighteners in the same place out of young children's reach – that way you'll feel less like you constantly need eyes in the back of your head. Child Safety Week helps alert parents to these changes and the simple steps they can take to make their homes safer for children”.

Less common but potentially serious home accidents highlighted in the NetMums survey included eating detergent capsules and getting tangled in blind cords. At least one child every year dies from blind cord strangulation.

Siobhan Freegard, Founder of NetMums, says: “All children suffer bumps and knocks, they're part of growing up and often as a mum your attention is grabbed by more obvious dangers, like roads for example. But increasingly we're seeing mums highlighting accidents occurring in the home in ways they just haven't expected, and warning other mums of the risks. Once mums are aware of an issue they focus their attention to prevent it”.

To find out more about child safety, including advice and information on how to make your home safe, visit www.childsafetyweek.org.uk or contact a local SureStart Children's Centre.

Ends

For more information and/or to arrange interviews with CAPT spokesperson please contact Dawn Newman on 0207 654 7309/ dawn.newman@iris-pr.com , Jane Walton on 0207 654 7634 / jane.walton@iris-pr.com, Mark Southern on 0207 654 4758 marke.southern@iris-pr.com or Sarah Hall on 0207 654 7636/ sarah.hall@iris-pr.com

NOTES TO EDITORS

Child Accident Prevention Trust:

The Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) is the UK's leading charity working to reduce the number of children and young people killed, disabled or seriously injured in accidents. It wants to see children leading active, healthy lives – not 'wrapped in cotton wool'. It is the national organiser of Child Safety Week. For more information visit www.capt.org.uk/aboutus

Child Safety Week sponsors:

Child Safety Week 2009's official supporters are:

- The Department for Children, Schools and Families www.dcsf.gov.uk
- The Department of Health www.dh.gov.uk
- The Department for Transport www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk
- The Scottish Government www.scotland.gov.uk
- Bitrex[®], the bittering agent that deters young children from drinking household cleaning products www.bitrex.com
- The Electrical Safety Council, a charity promoting electrical safety www.electricalsafetycouncil.org.uk

Statistics:

- NetMums questioned 1,166 mums of children under five on their concerns for their children's safety. The survey ran from 31 May to 7 June 2009.
- The four most common causes of hospital admissions for children under five due to accidents in the home are (Hospital Episode Statistics, 2007-08):
 1. Falls
 2. Exposure to inanimate mechanical forces

3. Accidental poisoning
4. Contact with heat and hot substances

- Regional breakdown for children under five admitted to hospital due to accidents in the home, (Hospital Episode Statistics, 2007-08):
 - North-West 3,608
 - North East 1,199
 - South-West 1,921
 - East Midlands 1,741
 - South-East 3,329
 - Yorkshire and The Humber 2,045
 - East of England 1,844
 - West Midlands 1,814
 - London 2,087

Sources:

1. In 2006-07 123.1 0-17 year olds per 10,000 were admitted to hospital because of unintentional and deliberate injuries. In 2007-08 this figure stood at 121.5. Hospital Episode Statistics, England

2. In 1997-98 233 children aged under five were admitted to hospital as a result of contact burns but in 2006-07 this increased to 358 (Hospital Episode Statistics, England, 1997-1998 and 2006-2007)

3. *Burns in children caused by hair straighteners: epidemiology and investigation of heating/cooling curves*, Journal of Burn Care and Research 2008, Mehta et al .
Contact burns from hair straighteners: a new hazard in the home, Emergency Medicine Journal 2006, Duncan et al, *Hair straighteners: a significant burn risk*, Burns Journal, 2008, Breuning and Papini.

4. Legislation [requires all electric plugs and sockets to meet stringent safety requirements](#). Young children are unlikely to have the dexterity or patience needed to be able to access live parts inside the socket [as they are protected by a shutter](#). Something [would need to be pushed](#) far enough into the top hole of the socket and one of the bottom holes while the switch is on [to reach any live parts](#). Little fingers won't fit.