

factsheet

burns and scalds

This factsheet presents background information mainly for people working with children and families, and students undertaking projects.

More advice on burns prevention can be found in capt's leaflet *How safe is your child from burns and scalds?* written for parents and carers. A sample of this leaflet can be downloaded from capt's website www.capt.org.uk, where you can also find out how to purchase bulk supplies.

Child Accident Prevention Trust publishes a range of resources for parents, carers and older children, containing comprehensive safety advice. A complete list of these resources – leaflets, booklets, posters, guides, etc – can be found at www.capt.org.uk together with details of how to obtain them.

How many children are burned each year?

In 2002 in the UK

- Almost 37,000 children under 15 were injured in burn and scald accidents
- The majority (nearly 28,000) were under 5 years old
- 95 per cent of thermal injuries to children happened at home.
- Over half of all severe burns and scalds happened in the kitchen

In 2007 in the UK, 18 children under 11 years died as a result of accidental house fires, including 15 under 5s. Most of these deaths would have been caused by smoke inhalation.

Over half the children who go to casualty with a burn or scald are referred on for further hospital or specialist care and recovery may be long and painful. Many also have to live with permanent scarring.

Scalds

Hot liquids cause 70 per cent of all thermal injuries to children. The most common single cause of scalds is hot drinks. Babies and toddlers are particularly at risk when they grasp cups and mugs of hot tea or coffee. Other common causes include steam or water from kettles and hot oil or fat. Children may also be scalded by hot tap water.

Burns

Children can suffer burns after contact with heaters, open fires, cookers, barbecues, irons, fireworks, matches, cigarette lighters, candles or any other hot surface. Young children are also particularly vulnerable to sunburn.

House fires

House fires can be caused by cigarettes, candles, chip pans or through faulty wiring. Another common cause is young children playing with matches or cigarette lighters.

What can be done to prevent burns and scalds?

Advice on preventing burns and scalds written for parents and carers can be found in **capt's** leaflet *How safe is your child from burns and scalds?* A sample of this leaflet can be downloaded from capt's website www.capt.org.uk, where you can also find out how to purchase bulk supplies.

Hot drinks

- Never pick up or hold a child or baby when you have a hot drink in your hand
- Keep mugs and cups away from the edges of tables and counters - out of sight and reach of young children

Kettles and saucepans

- Use kettles with short and/or curly cords and keep the cords well out of sight and reach of toddlers
- Use back burners or elements when cooking and turn all pot handles away from edges

Hot water

- **Never leave a young child alone in the bathroom**
- Ensure that hot water is delivered below 46°C. See the **capt factsheets** about thermostatic mixing valves and bath water scald prevention.
- Always run the cold water into baths and basins before hot
- Make sure that young children do not play with hot taps. Tap guards are available to help protect young children at bath time

Microwave ovens

- Always stir food or shake bottles heated in the microwave before giving them to a child – microwave heating can produce hot spots.

Cookers, hobs/hotplates and barbecues

- Keep children well away from hot surfaces (including oven doors)
- Remember that barbecues stay hot for several hours after use
- Make sure cookers or barbecues are secure and cannot be pulled over

Heaters and fires

- Fit fireguards to all heaters and fires. Never air clothes over the fireguards
- Remember radiators can get very hot. If possible do not put a child's bed next to a radiator.

Irons

- Do not use irons on the floor
- Unplug the iron immediately after use and put on a high work surface out of the sight and reach of your children while it cools down

Matches, cigarette lighters and candles

- Never leave candles burning unattended and do not allow children to play with them
- Always keep matches and cigarette lighters out of sight and reach of young children
- Teach older children about the dangers fire and use matches and lighters safely

Safety Equipment

Having the right safety equipment can help prevent accidents or can give you vital extra time in the event of a fire.

- **Fit smoke alarms and test them regularly to make sure they are working.** Practise escape routes regularly with older children so they know what to do in an emergency.
- Use fireguards on all fires
- Use a kettle with a curly or short flex that does not hang over the edge of the work surface.

Further information

The statistics used in this factsheet are drawn from a number of sources. The government's Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System that collected information throughout the UK from 1978 was closed down in May 2003. Enquiries should be directed to Information Centre, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, Edgbaston Park, 353 Bristol Road, Birmingham B5 7ST, email: infocentre@rospa.com, fax: 0121 248 2001, tel: 0121 248 2066.

Copies of the Annual Reports of the Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System can be downloaded from www.ndad.nationalarchives.gov.uk/CRDA/58/DD/1/detail.html. The reports for 1998 – 2002 inclusive can be downloaded from www.hassandlass.org.uk/query/reports.htm. Visit www.hassandlass.org.uk to interrogate the database for 2000-2002 yourself.

Factsheets with more detailed information on a variety of accident topics can be found on the Child Accident Prevention Trust website, www.capt.org.uk or can be provided by post on receipt of a stamped address envelope and a list of the subjects you require.

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