

Avoid Burn Injuries in the Home

By: Michael Young

February 5th-11th has been designated Burn Awareness Week in 2012. Burn Awareness week is designed to educate the community on burn injuries and how to stay safe, especially when at home. This educational series is extremely important because over 100,000 children were seen in emergency rooms across the country last year for a certain type of burn injury and none of them were even around a flame. Those children were the victims of a burn injury known as scalding, an injury that is almost 100% preventable.

A scalding injury occurs when hot liquid, hot food or steam damages one or more layers of skin. The majority of these scalding injuries took place inside household kitchens or bathrooms, most likely when there was a brief lapse in adult supervision. It's not hard to understand why young children are at risk of scalding injuries. Children, especially the younger ones, are very curious and often imitate adults. This may involve mimicking actions in the kitchen and reaching for hot pots and pans on the stove. Children do not have the motor skills to react quickly once they come in contact with a hot object and because they have thinner skin than older children and adults, they suffer burn injuries at a lower temperature and with shorter exposure.

Scalding can also occur when a child is left unattended in a bath tub causing burns from the lengthy exposure, and usually cover large areas of the body. Other scalds can take place when adults are jostled while holding a restless child in their arm or on their lap while drinking a hot beverage. An adult can also slip or lose their grip while removing hot food from a stove or oven, or carrying it to a table, causing themselves or someone else to get injured.

Things to think about:

- A healthy adult can be burned by liquids at 155°F within 1 second, 140°F within 5 seconds, 120°F within 5 minutes. Children can be burned in half that time.
- The clothes on which a substance is spilled retains heat until they are removed.
- The thicker a substance, the more heat it retains and the more it sticks to the body.
- Children, Elderly, and those with a handicap are most at risk for scalding injuries
- 65% of all children hospitalized for burns are from scalding injuries
- Hot tap water causes more hospitalizations/deaths than any other liquid
- 95% of burns from a microwave are scalding injuries
- Always set water heater at lowest level. Water temperature should never rise above 120°F in residences and 110°F in nursing homes/day cares
- Always establish a "kid-safe" zone in the kitchen, keep all children at least 3 feet from any cooking appliance
- Use the back burners on the stove when possible
- Turn pot/pan handles toward the back of stove
- Avoid using table cloths. Children can use these to pull hot object down on them.

- DO NOT warm baby bottles in the microwave
- DO NOT hold a child while cooking or carrying a hot beverage

Emergency Care for scalding injuries:

- Remove victim from source of injury
- Remove all clothing items that are affected like shirt, socks, diapers, etc.
- Run cool (not cold) water over affected area. If water is unavailable, any cool non acidic drink will work. DO NOT USE ICE- it can cause further damage
- Call 9-1-1
- Apply a clean dry compress to the affected area
- DO NOT APPLY BUTTER, GREASE, CREAMS, OINTMENTS, ETC. This can increase the risk of an infection.

Although children, the elderly and those with disabilities are the most susceptible to scalding injuries, anyone of any age can receive a scalding injury. Per www.ameriburn.org, over 500,000 people are burned every year. With simple environmental and behavioral changes, we can take the necessary steps in preventing these injuries.