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Shriners Children's Help Families Prevent Scald Burns at Home

National Burn Awareness Week Focuses on Scald Education and Prevention, February 5-11

February 2023 – Cold weather comforts like hot chocolate and homemade soup are staples during the winter season, but hot liquids like these also pose a risk for scald burns. Many people don't realize how serious scalds can be, especially for children. Scalds are the leading cause of burn injuries in young children under the age of 5, yet 75% of scald injuries are preventable. During National Burn Awareness Week, Shriners Children's is partnering with the American Burn Association to educate families about the prevention of scald injuries at home.

Burn Awareness Week is Shriners Children's launch of a yearlong educational campaign aimed at burn awareness and prevention. Free educational materials, available via the website beburnaware.org, are designed to be a resource for parents, teachers, firefighters and others concerned with the safety and well-being of children. Resources include tip sheets and fact cards.

"It takes only a few seconds for a child to suffer a serious and painful scald burn," said Robert Sheridan, M.D., chief of staff and director of the burn service at Shriners Children's Boston. "These burn injuries are often caused during everyday activities, like cooking and bathing."

A scald injury occurs when a portion of skin is exposed to hot liquid or steam. Unlike the four degrees of dry burns, scald burns are usually limited to first or second degree, depending on the depth of the damage. Third degree scald injuries can occur if there is prolonged contact with the burn source.

Whether caused by hot food, liquids or tap water, scald injuries can be extremely painful, and may require prolonged treatment. Teaching your family about potential dangers that come with everyday activities can help prevent a scald burn from occurring at home. Follow these tips in areas of the house where scald risk is highest.

Scald prevention in the kitchen:

- Never leave the kitchen while cooking. If you have to leave the room, take your children with you and watch them at all times.
- Establish a "kid-free zone" 3 feet around the stove and all areas where food and drink are prepared.
- Cook with pots on back burners and turn handles in.
- Test heated foods and liquids before serving to children.
- Do not cook or carry hot items while holding a child.
- Keep hot items away from edges of counters or tables.
- Use placemats instead of tablecloths. A tablecloth can be hazardous if a young child pulls on it while hot food is on the table.

“Scalds are usually preventable injuries,” said Dr. Petra Warner, chief of staff at Shriners Children’s Ohio. “Most occur in the kitchen, so a best practice is to keep young children out of the kitchen until they can understand the risks. Even then, don’t let them use a microwave, stove or oven unsupervised.”

Before allowing children to use the microwave, make sure they are tall enough to operate and reach it. Many scalds happen when kids reach up into the microwave to remove items, and hot liquids spill.

- Never allow children to handle microwaved containers until they have cooled off enough to be touched, and remind them to open food slowly with the container held away from their face.
- Remind children that foods and liquids heated in the microwave may be much hotter than their containers.
- Microwave popcorn bags should never be opened right away; steam released from the bag can cause a burn in seconds.

Ingrid Parry, a physical therapist and researcher at Shriners Children’s Northern California, was named president of the [American Burn Association \(ABA\)](#) for the 2022-2023 year. Parry stresses that prevention is key, and everyone should be more aware of the most common burn risk areas in the home - the kitchen and the bathroom.

“Burn injuries from tipping scalding liquids is common for children under 5,” said Parry. “Many people believe that tap water isn’t able to get hot enough to cause a really devastating burn, but the reality is, tap water from sinks and bathtubs lead to some of the most common scald burns for children under 5. That’s why the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission urges all users to lower their water heaters to 120 degrees Fahrenheit.”

It is important for adults to remember that a child’s skin burns at a lower temperature than that of teens and adults. Tap water that may not be too hot for an adult could be too hot for a child, increasing the risk for a painful scald.

Scald prevention in the bathroom:

- Set the water heater temperature no hotter than 120°F.
- When filling the bathtub, run cold water first.
- Always test bathwater with your wrist or elbow before placing a child into the tub.
- If possible, install anti-scald devices on water faucets and shower heads, which will automatically shut off the water if the temperature becomes too hot.
- Face a child in the bathtub away from faucets.
- Never leave children alone in the bathtub.
- Use knob covers on faucets, so children are unable to manipulate the faucet and turn it on themselves.

If a child suffers a scald at home, there are steps families can take to treat the burn:

- Immediately remove the child from the heat source.
- Remove any clothing from the area that’s been burned. Don’t attempt to remove clothing or anything else stuck to their skin.
- Run cool water over the burn to help decrease the pain.
- Apply a gauze bandage or place a clean, soft cloth or towel over the burn. Don’t wrap the burn tightly; instead cover it loosely.

- Don't apply any ointments, butter, sprays or other treatments to the burned area. They can actually make it worse.
- If you see blisters in the burned area, don't break them.
- Don't put ice on a burn.

If your child receives a burn of any kind that requires urgent care, Shriners Children's can help. Contact one of our specialty burn care locations: [Shriners Children's Boston](#), [Shriners Children's Northern California](#), [Shriners Children's Ohio](#) and [Shriners Children's Texas](#).

About Shriners Children's

Shriners Children's is changing lives every day by providing pediatric specialty care, conducting innovative research and offering outstanding educational programs for medical professionals. Our health care system provides care for children with orthopedic conditions, burns, spinal cord injuries, and cleft lip and palate, regardless of the families' ability to pay. Shriners Children's is a nonprofit organization and relies on the generosity of donors. All donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law. For more information, please visit shrinerschildrens.org.

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