

In Australia, one child dies due to fire every fortnight.¹

Almost every day in Queensland, one child aged up to four is taken to hospital by ambulance after experiencing a burn,² and three children under four are treated at an emergency department for a burn injury.³

The risks

Death and injuries from burns occur most commonly among children aged up to four. Fires cause around one in six deaths in this age group across Australia, and 19 percent of all deaths due to fire occur at these ages.¹

In Queensland, almost two children aged up to four are hospitalised per week for more than a day after sustaining a serious burn injury.^{4,5}

Death and injuries from burns are more common among boys than girls.^{1,3}

Burns can occur at any time, but most commonly occur during the evenings and on weekends.⁶

Scalds⁶

Many burns are from scalds, due to hot liquids such as beverages (coffee/tea), hot tap water, and spilled food (soup and noodles). These often require skin grafts and can result in scarring.

Hot objects³

Burn injuries commonly occur due to contact with hot objects such as the oven door, barbeque, iron, heater, exhaust pipes, cooking appliances (such as frying pan, toaster, kettle) and utensils. Machinery such as lawnmowers can also result in burns.

Chemical burns⁶

Chemical burns mainly occur in the kitchen, but also in the backyard, garden shed/garage, and in the bedroom/bathroom. Chemical burns most frequently involve dishwasher detergents, followed by bleach and other caustic agents like drain cleaners, pool chemicals and paint thinners/strippers.

Fire/flame burns⁶

The most common burns from fire and flames are from open fires and children falling into or walking over fire ash. Playing with sparklers, matches and lighters is another common cause of fire or flame injuries, as is house fires. Burns from fires/smoke most commonly occur in the backyard, at camping grounds/paddocks, and the beach.

Other burns⁶

Serious injuries can be caused by friction burns (most commonly from treadmills or exercise-bike wheels), electrical burns (from sticking objects into power points or chewing on electrical cables) and sunburn.

Injuries

Burn injuries most commonly occur to the arms and hands, legs/feet, head/neck, and trunk.

In many cases, more than one part of the body is burned.³ Burns can also occur to the inside of the throat and other internal organs, usually the result of swallowing caustic chemicals, or exposure to smoke.⁶

Prevention⁶

- Keep hot drinks away from the edges of tables and benches. Never hold a hot drink and a child at the same time.
- Use rear elements if possible on stovetops and keep handles turned inwards. Stove-top guards and barriers will keep hot pots out of reach.
- Use a child gate to prevent children from accessing kitchens and bathrooms.
- Tempering valves should be installed on your hot water system to keep hot water at 50°C.
- Keep clothing irons, curling irons and hair straighteners out of reach, especially when cooling down.
- Install guards around sources of heat such as heaters, furnaces and fireplaces.
- Keep all chemicals and cleaning products, including dishwashing materials, up high out of reach or in cupboards with child-resistant locks.
- Keep garden sheds padlocked or have a locked storage cupboard in the garage for petrol and other solvents.
- Always put your campfire out with water, not sand.
- Install and regularly test electric safety switches and photoelectric smoke alarms.
- Have a fire escape plan that you practise with your children and learn how to use your fire extinguisher and fire blanket.
- Plastic caps for all power points in your home will help prevent electrocution.
- Keep matches and lighters out of reach.
- Choose low fire danger clothing for young children.
- Be extra vigilant with children around open fires.
- Use a child gate to prevent access to exercise rooms.
- Keep the magnetic key for treadmills out of reach and unplug the machine when not in use.
- 'Slip, slop, slap and wrap' – remember to dress children appropriately with, hats and sunscreen, and keep them in the shade.

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First aid for burns⁷

If your child or someone you know is burned, take the following action:

REMOVE clothing and jewellery

- Immediately remove clothing and jewellery from the burnt area.
- Clothing can hold heat on the burnt area. If swelling occurs, jewellery can block blood flow to the burnt area.

COOL with running water

- Apply cold running water for 20 minutes.
- Keep the rest of the patient warm to prevent hypothermia.

COVER and protect the burnt area.

- Use clingwrap or a clean cloth to wrap the burnt area.
- Do NOT use ice, oil, creams or other substances.

SEEK medical attention

- Seek medical attention for all burns to children (or the elderly, or for adult burns larger than a 50-cent coin, or for burns that are white or blistered).



For more information on burns, see:
coolburns.com.au

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Sources

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