

FACTSHEET



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Hot water and scalds

What is a scald?

A scald is a burn caused by hot liquid or vapours.



How may a child be injured?

Burns

A child is most likely to be injured in the home, with most scalds caused by:

Hot drinks

- Children can pull hot drinks such as tea and coffee over themselves.
- Children often access hot drinks while they are sitting on an adult's lap or by pulling at a tablecloth where the hot drink is located.

Foods, fats and cooking oils

- Children can get burnt when they have access to the kitchen while others are cooking.
- Burns from hot noodles in a cup are becoming an increasing cause of injury, with the liquid from the cup spilling onto their bodies.

- Children may also access saucepans or electrical equipment on the bench by grabbing an accessible handle or loose cord.
- Children can also get burnt when they reach up to pull hot liquids out of a microwave, or down from the stove.

Hot tap water

- Hot tap-water burns often occur in the bathroom, mainly from baths containing water heated to unsafe temperatures. Children may also get burns from turning on hot taps while in the bath.
- Water at 65°C produces a deep burn in less than a second; at 60°C it takes five seconds and at 55°C it takes thirty seconds. Water at 50°C takes five minutes to produce a deep burn.¹ Therefore, it is recommended to lower the temperature that water is delivered to your bathroom to 50°C (by asking a plumber to install a tempering device).

How common are these injuries?

From 2005 to 2013, there were 5,448 (72.7%) burns among children aged 0-4 years in NSW.² A large majority of burns in this age group occurred in the kitchen (57%) with soups, noodles, tea and coffee being among the most common causes of scalds.

Is there a Law or an Australian Standard for hot water systems?

The law in Australia states that newly installed hot water systems delivering water to any outlet primarily used for personal hygiene purposes, such as basins, baths and showers, must be set at a temperature no greater than 50°C in domestic settings (AS 3500.4 -1994 & AS/NZS

3500.4.2:1997). Older homes may not have this tempering device installed, however it is possible to have a plumber add this device to any bathroom.

In July 2012, NSW adopted the Plumbing Code of Australia (PCA) which requires a temperature control device to be installed when replacing a water heater, regardless of whether it is new or existing.

References

1 Public Health Association of Australia (2008). Hot Water Temperature and Scald Burns Policy. PHAA. Available from: www.phaa.net.au/documents/policy/20081002revisedHOTWATERTEMPERATUREANDSCALDBURNS.pdf

2. SBIS (2014) *Unpublished data*.

Remember:

Safety devices

- Contact a licensed plumber to install a temperature control device, to deliver water at a temperature no greater than 50°C in personal hygiene areas.
- Child resistant taps can also be installed to stop children from turning on the taps, but they do not reduce the hot water temperature.

Supervision

- Young children should never be left alone in the bathroom.
- Never leave a toddler in the company of another child, especially in the bath
- Take the phone off the hook or turn the answering machine on before running the bath for young children so that you are not distracted while children are in the bath.
- Keep the bathroom door closed when the bathroom is not in use.

Running a bath

- To run a bath, always turn on the cold water tap before the hot water tap and turn the hot water tap off before the cold water tap when filled. The same applies when taking a shower.
- Always check the temperature before putting a young child in the bath. You may check the temperature by dipping your elbow in the water or by using a bath thermometer. A maximum of 40°C is recommended for small children.

Cooking

- Use the back stove elements to cook.
- Turn saucepan handles so they are out of reach of young children.
- Use a barrier such as a stove guard or safety gate to keep young children out of the kitchen when cooking.
- Push the kettle and other appliances to the rear of the bench.
- Empty unused boiled water from the kettle.
- Use a cordless kettle or wind up the cords under the base.
- Do not throw water on burning oil. Water can cause the fire to spread and cause serious burns.
- Children should eat hot noodles at a table so they do not spill in their lap. Always drain the water from noodles prior to eating.

Microwave

- Do not heat baby bottles in the microwave.
- Always follow the recommended cooking time on labels. Over-heating food and liquids may result in it exploding.
- For older children, make sure microwaves are at a level where children are not reaching above their waist to remove food from the microwave.

Hot Drinks

- Do not hold a young child while you are holding a hot drink.
- Do not leave hot drinks in reach of young children.
- Do not use table cloths as these can be pulled down by young children.

First aid for burns

- Use cool running water on a burn for **20 minutes**.
- This will stop the burning process and cool the burn. Cool running water can be useful within three hours of a burn.
- **Call 000 or seek medical help if you are unsure.**
- Never use ice, iced water, cream, toothpaste or butter on a burn as they can make the burn worse.
- Burn creams do not cool the burn and must not be used instead of cool running water.