Fact Sheets for Families

Fire and Burn Injuries

Children are very vulnerable to fires and burns because of their curiosity and ignorance of the danger of fire. Hundreds of children in the United States die and countless others are disfigured every year as a result of burn injuries. Children ages five or younger are especially vulnerable to burns and have one of the highest fire death rates. They may be unable to leave burning buildings, and die as a result of smoke inhalation.

Hot liquids—not fire—are the most common cause of burns to young children. Hot liquids burn like fire and can cause serious and painful burns. However, fires caused by playing with matches and lighters are the number one cause of fire-related deaths among young children.

The risk of fire and burn injuries is related to the age and developmental levels of children.

- Infants may be scalded by drinking liquids or hot tap water.
- Toddlers may spill hot liquids and foods, or touch hot surfaces or electrical wiring.
- Preschool and early school-age children may play with matches or lighters.

Preventing fire and burn injuries

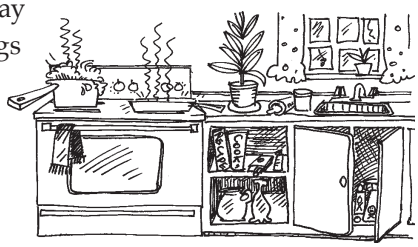
Most fire and burn injuries are preventable. The following tips will help you keep your children safe.

Burn prevention

- Never leave small children alone.
- Do not drink or carry anything hot near a child.
- Do not allow children in cooking areas without supervision.
- Keep hot foods and drinks, electric hot plates or lit candles away from the edge of tables and counters; do not leave them on tablecloths that children can pull down.
- Use your stove's rear burners for cooking, and turn the handles of pots toward the rear or center of the stove.
- Test hot food before giving it to a child, especially if it has been heated in a microwave oven. Never warm baby bottles in a microwave oven.
- Install and regularly check smoke detectors.
- Keep the temperature of your hot water heater at 120ºF or lower.
- Children should sleep in non-flammable clothing.

Fire Prevention

- Plan a fire escape route and practice it.
- Train your children how to properly respond to a fire; teach them to know the sound of the smoke alarm and two ways out of every room. Teach them how to stop, drop and roll.
- Install and regularly check smoke detectors.
- Keep a fire extinguisher on hand, know how to use it, and refill it immediately after each use. Have it checked at the same time each year (perhaps when you change your smoke batteries).
- Use safety devices to cover electrical outlets and avoid overloading electrical wiring.
- Store matches, lighters, chemicals and other hazardous items out of reach of children.
- Check for fire and burn dangers in your home, and make the changes necessary to keep your children safe.
- Put barriers around fireplaces, radiators and hot pipes.
- Never use portable, open flame or space heaters.
- Teach children to stay away from hot things and not to play with matches, lighters, chemicals and electrical equipment.



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