

Burns And The Home Care Client

Protect yourself and your home care clients by following some simple steps to prevent burns. Burns are a frequent cause of malpractice suits against home health professionals and home health agencies. They are recognized as among the most painful injuries a person can sustain and survive, and may require long periods of rehabilitation involving many surgeries. Because young children and older adults have thinner skin, their skin burns at lower temperatures, more deeply and in less time. Therefore, burn prevention becomes even more important in the home care population.



Common Causes Of Burns	Did You Know?	What To Do When A Burn Occurs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scalds due to lack of supervision in the tub/shower • Bath/shower water too hot • Overheating of hot water bottles or heating pads • Spills from hot liquids or solids, either while cooking or eating/drinking • Cigarette burns • Fire due to flammable substances, such as oxygen and household cleaners • Skin contact with chemicals • Electrical burns and fires from faulty wiring or improper grounding 	<p>Young children and older adults have the highest death rates from fire and burns in the U.S.¹</p> <p>For younger children, scald burn injury (hot liquid and steam) is the most common form of injury. For older children, flame burns (direct contact with fire) are more prevalent. However, electrical burns (contact with an electrical source) and chemical burns (skin contact with chemicals) also occur.²</p> <p>Home water heaters leave the factory set at 140 to 150 degrees Fahrenheit. It takes only 2 seconds for a child or older adult to receive a serious burn at 150 degrees Fahrenheit, 5 seconds at 140 degrees and 30 seconds at 130 degrees. The times may be even less for a sick child or adult.³ That's why it's important to never leave someone in a bathtub unattended, even to answer the phone or run a quick errand.</p>	<p>Contact your home health agency if a burn occurs. The type of first aid treatment will depend on the burn injury. A Registered Nurse (RN) should complete a patient assessment as soon as possible and assess for healthcare needs.</p> <p>Follow the home health agency's policies and procedures regarding treatment and documentation, including completion of an incident report. Never assume a burn is minor without proper medical evaluation. Keep in mind that children or fragile adults may be unable to tolerate the physical stress and pain from a burn injury. If you feel the burn is severe and needs urgent medical attention, call 911 or arrange for timely transportation to the nearest hospital, as appropriate.</p> <p>Be aware that some burns can be life threatening and require immediate medical attention. Examples of critical burn situations can include:⁴</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Victim has difficulty breathing. 2. Burns cover more than one of the victim's body parts. 3. Burns occur to the head, neck, hands, feet or genitals 4. Victim is an infant, young child or an elderly person and the burn is other than a very minor one 5. Burns resulted from chemicals, explosions, or Electricity or home oxygen therapy

¹National Ag Safety Database (NASD), "Prevention and Treatment of Burns - Miscellaneous Causes," www.nasdonline.org

²National SAFE KIDS Campaign (NSKC). Burn Injury Fact Sheet. Washington (DC): NSKC, 2004. www.safekids.org

³NASD, "Hot Water Burns," 04/2002, www.nasdonline.org

⁴"Prevention and Treatment of Burns - Miscellaneous Causes," www.nasdonline.org



Burn Prevention Tips

There are several simple measures that home care professionals, clients and caretakers can take to prevent burns. Client and family education about these techniques are important so that a safe environment can be provided, even when the home care professional is not present.

The following are some key guidelines for burn prevention:

- Perform a fire/burn safety assessment on the home environment. This includes, at the very least, determining the presence of escape routes, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, toxic chemicals, flammable substances such as oxygen cylinders and cleaning fluids, electrical hazards, and microwaves.
- Test the temperature of tap water by holding an outdoor thermometer or candy thermometer in the stream of running water until the temperature stops rising. The temperature should not be greater than 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Generally, the water in the tub/shower should not be hotter than 100 degrees. Inform the client, family, or other responsible individual that the water heater needs to be adjusted if it is greater than this temperature.
- Never leave a child or older adult in the shower or bathtub unattended, even for a few seconds. Never place the client in the tub while it is filling with water.
- Test bath/shower water before putting an individual in it by moving your hand through the water for a few seconds. If it feels hot to you, it will burn the person. The water temperature can be tested with a thermometer before placing the client in the bath/shower.
- Suggest the client, family, or significant other consider installing pressure balancing, thermostatically controlled shower/tub valves which reduce the water temperature to 115 degrees or less.
- Place small children in the tub with their back to the faucet so they can't turn on the water. Suggest knob covers for the bathroom tub/shower.
- When cooking in the kitchen, keep the pot handles turned in so the pots can't be pulled or knocked off the stove. Use the back burners, when possible. Don't wear supplemental oxygen when cooking.
- Be careful when heating liquids in the microwave, since the containers may only feel warm but the contents may be very hot. Test the liquid or food before serving. Never place a hot water bottle or any other object intended to come in contact with the client's skin in the microwave.
- Always place layered protection (e.g. towels, cloths, etc.) between the client's skin and a heating pad, according to your agency's protocols.
- Don't offer very hot liquids to drink. Younger children, or sick and older, confused adults may accidentally spill hot liquids and cause a severe scald burn. Never leave the client unattended when providing warmed liquids.
- Never place hot liquids or solids at the edge of a counter. Don't leave an over-the-bed stand unattended with hot substances.
- Never smoke cigarettes when substances that can cause a fire are present in the room, such as supplemental oxygen therapy. Store oxygen cylinders in a well ventilated, cool, dry place. Completely extinguish all smoldering cigarettes.
- Avoid client smoking in bed. Recommend fire resistant pajamas. Always supervise when a client is smoking, and never leave unattended even for a few seconds. Consider recommending "safety ashtrays" with wide lips.
- Store all detergents, cleaning agents, bleach, and other chemicals out of reach or in a locked cabinet. Store flammable substances away from heat sources.

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