

The Heat is On!

Burns and scalds

A 'burn' is an injury to skin tissue in close contact with fire or heat. A 'scald' is a type of burn you get from hot liquid or steam. Burns and scalds raise the temperature of the skin so much that the cells begin to die. Doctors usually put burns and scalds into three categories, according to how serious they are:

- **First-degree burn** – least serious, affecting only the upper layer of skin (e.g. accidentally touching the hotplate on hair straighteners). Symptoms can include swelling, pain and redness of the skin.
- **Second-degree burn** – affects the first and second skin layer (e.g. spilling boiling water from a saucepan on your bare skin). Symptoms are the same as for first-degree burns but the skin goes bright red and can blister and scar. These need medical help and can take several weeks to heal.
- **Third-degree burn** – most serious, affecting both skin layers and sometimes organs and even bones (e.g. being burnt in a house fire). The area can turn brown, black or white. The injury can leave a deep scar and may even need reconstructive surgery.

Key safety messages for the home and workplace:

- Never leave hot things unattended – even to leave the room for a few minutes.
- Keep anything hot in a secure place, where it won't fall, out of reach of children or pets
- Keep hot items well away from anything flammable (that catches fire easily).
- Make sure cables from hot items like kettles and irons aren't left dangling, where they can be pulled over.
- Always be careful when cooking. Use oven gloves to handle hot pans and dishes. Keep saucepans to the back of the cooker – make sure handles aren't hanging over the cooker edge (where they can be knocked over). Remember that metal objects conduct heat very quickly. Ideally, chip pans, kettles and pans shouldn't be more than a third full.
- Be careful with hot liquids. Don't leave hot drinks lying about or where they can be knocked over. When running a bath, run the cold tap first and then add the hot water you need.
- Remember that electrical items (like lamps, laptops and mobile phones can get hot. Unplug hot electrical items as soon as you've finished with them. Remember that they can stay hot for a while. Don't leave things to charge for long periods of time and switch things off rather than leaving them on 'standby' – it's better for the environment too!

Basic First Aid

- Run the burn under cool water for 10 to 15 minutes (or longer if it still hurts).
- When it's cooled, move clothing away from the burn (unless the material's sticking to the skin).
- Don't touch it or apply creams, etc; just wrap it loosely in cling film.
- Get medical advice if the burn is serious, is bigger than a stamp, or is on sensitive areas like the face, groin, joints, feet or hands.
- Remember that, with burns, there might also be a risk of infection or shock.

More information about first aid can be found at the St. John Ambulance website: www.sja.org.uk