

Outdoor Burns and Scalds

Fact Sheet

Burns and scalds are a significant problem in Western Australia. Almost 500 children a year are treated for a burn or scald at the Perth Children's Hospital Emergency Department.

More than half of the children admitted to hospital for a burn or scald are under the age of five. Young children are particularly at risk as they are becoming increasingly mobile but do not have the skills to assess dangers.

Severe burns and scalds can be extremely devastating to a child and their family, often requiring multiple hospital visits and leaving **lifelong scarring**. Common outdoor causes of burns and scalds to children include:

- Plastic and metal play equipment
- Artificial grass
- Hot hose water
- Campfires
- Firepits
- Barbeques
- Sun exposure

It is vital children are supervised at all times around any burns risk and source of fire.

Playground equipment

Plastic and metal play equipment can retain heat and be hot to the touch when exposed to sunlight, increasing the risk of burns in young children

Preventing burns

- Avoid buying slides made from metal as these may reach high temperatures when exposed to sunlight. Choose slides made from **plastic** or **fibreglass** and ensure the shade is over the sliding surface.

- To **test the surface temperature**, place one hand over the surface for five seconds – If the surface is too hot for your hand, it will be too hot for young children.
- Ensure children wear **enclosed shoes** when playing on play equipment.
- Artificial grass can retain heat when exposed to sunlight. Check the temperature of the grass before allowing children to play and ensure children are wearing enclosed shoes.

Shade

Shade is essential for all outdoor spaces to minimise exposure to UV radiation. Excessive sun exposure for children can increase their risk of skin cancer later in life.

Preventing burns

- Utilise any existing shade in your backyard when creating new play spaces for children.
- Provide children with other means of protection from UV radiation such as hats, protective clothing and SPF 50+ sunscreen.
- Where minimal shade is available in the backyard or local parks, encourage children to stay indoors during the hottest hours of the day.

Note:

Hoses are commonly used to cool down hot surfaces e.g., play equipment, artificial grass etc. on hot days.

To prevent serious scalds, let the hose water run until the water runs cool, then begin hosing down your desired area.

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Campfire and Firepits

Particularly in the winter months, campfires and backyard fire pits pose a burn risk to young children.

- Teach children fire safety and rules.
- Choose a clear area with no overhanging branches and minimal grass and scrub.
- Ensure your campfire and firepit is adequately constructed and if located on the ground, surround it with large rocks to prevent burning materials from escaping.
- Always supervise children around fires and firepits and ensure they are kept at least 3 metres away.
- Do not burn vegetation or other rubbish.

Campfire safety

- Campfires should be positioned away from equipment, tents, and flammable items like fuel cans and gas bottles.¹
- Use seasoned dry firewood, untreated timbers or commercial hot coals.
- Start your campfire using an ignition source such as paper, matches and small kindling.¹

Firepit safety

- Check your Local Government Authorities for local fire bans and laws to ensure outdoor firepits are permitted.
- Firepits should be positioned away from structures such as sheds, fences, flammable items, and items prone to heat transference.¹
- Start your firepit using an ignition source such as matches, a lighter or other appropriate sources.¹

Extinguishing a campfire/fire pit

1. Use **water** to put out your fire once you have finished.
2. Never use dirt or sand to put out the fire; sand can retain heat for over 8 hours and **cause serious burns**.
3. If you used stones around the fire, leave them in place to mark the fire location so others can be aware.
4. Hot coals from firepits **should not** be put in garden beds or areas that can catch alight.



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Barbeques

Young children are at risk of injury when around barbeques. With barbeques reaching such high temperatures, little hands can suffer serious burns. Children are curious thinkers who often try to see what is happening without realising the dangers.

Barbeque safety

- Closely supervise children around barbeques
- Flammable liquids should never be used to light any fire.
- Always turn off the gas and disconnect the bottle when not in use.
- Keep matches out of children's reach.

First aid for burns and scalds

1. Remove any nappies or wet clothes.
2. Immediately apply cool running water for 20 minutes
3. Keep the child warm, to prevent them from going into shock.
4. Cover the burn with a light, loose, non-stick dressing. Do not use fluffy material, plastic cling film is a good option.
5. See a doctor if the burn or scald is on the face, hands, feet, genitals or buttocks, if it is larger than a 20-cent coin or blistered.
6. In an emergency, phone 000 for an ambulance.
 - Never use ice, oils, butters, ointments or creams.
 - Do not put a child with burns into a bath full of cold water.
 - If blisters develop don't pop them, seek medical attention for assistance.



1. Fiona Wood Foundation. Retrieved from: www.fionawood-foundation.org.au/fionawoodfoundation/media/images/out-door-recreational-fires-safety-tips-social-media-story-tile.png. May 2024.

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