



## **Hot Liquids Burn Like Fire: Scald Prevention**

### **Risk: Scald Burns**

A scald burn is caused by a hot liquid or a hot, moist vapor (steam), resulting in the damage of one or more layers of the skin. Most scald burn injuries happen in the home, in connection with the preparation or serving of hot food or beverages or from exposure to hot tap water in bathtubs and showers. Severe scalds also occur in the workplace, typically when pipes or valves fail while carrying or regulating the flow of steam. The severity of a scald injury depends on the temperature to which the skin is exposed and how long it is exposed.

The American Burn Association estimated that more than 75,000 scald burn injuries are seen in hospital emergency rooms annually in the U.S. 21% of these occurred to children 4 years old and younger.

Although scald burns can happen to anyone, young children, older adults, and people with disabilities are the most likely to incur such injuries.

Young children have thinner skin resulting in deeper burns than adults for the same temperature and exposure time to a scalding substance. Small children also have little control of their environment, less perception of danger, and less ability to escape a burning situation on their own. Children can grow fast and can reach new, dangerous things every day. They do not realize that hot liquids burn like fire.

Older adults also have thinner skin so hot liquids cause deeper burns with even brief exposure. The ability to feel heat may be decreased due to certain medical conditions so they may not realize water is too hot until the injury has occurred. Older adults may also have conditions that make them more prone to falls in the bathtub or shower or while carrying hot liquids.

Persons with disabilities are at high risk for all types of burn injuries including scalds. Mobility impairments, slow or awkward movements, muscle weakness, or slower reflexes increase the risk of spills while moving hot liquids. Burns to the lap are common when a person attempts to carry hot liquids while seated in a wheelchair. Sensory impairments can result in decreased sensation, especially to the hands and feet, so the person may not realize something is too hot. Also, changes to a person's intellect or judgment may hinder the person's ability to recognize a dangerous situation or respond appropriately to remove themselves from danger.

### **Preventing Scalds**

Scald injuries in the home can be easily prevented by following these basic tips: - Set water heater temperature to no higher than 120 degrees Fahrenheit, or just below the medium setting.

- Always be present when a child is in or around the bathtub; if you must leave, take the child(ren) with you.
- Create a "No Kid Zone" in the kitchen around the stove, oven, and hot items.
- Place pots and pans on the back burner with handles turned away from the edge of the stove.
- Make sure appliance cords (slow cookers, deep fryers, etc.) never dangle over the counter edge.
- Keep hot drinks away from the edge of tables and counters.
- Use a travel mug with a tight-fitting lid for all hot drinks.

### **Useful Resources:**

Scald Prevention - <https://www.ifsa.org/resources/scalds>

Scald Statistics & Data Resources - [https://ameriburn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/nbaw2019\\_statsdataresources\\_120618-1.pdf](https://ameriburn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/nbaw2019_statsdataresources_120618-1.pdf)

Scald Prevention - [ScaldPrevention.ashx \(nfpa.org\)](https://www.nfpa.org/scald-prevention)

