

Hot liquids leading cause of burns for children

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BURNS afflict more than 220,000 Australians a year, according to a report by the Australian and New Zealand Burns Association published today.

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The report, the most comprehensive yet of burns and their treatment in the two countries, shows children playing around adults preparing hot food and drinks are frequently scalded when the items fall on them.

For young people and adults, accidents around campfires represent the single highest cause of burns.

The burns expert Fiona Wood said the nature of many burns injuries, whether they be accidental scalding of children or people drunkenly attempting to jump bonfires, emphasised the need for constant community education of the dangers of heat.

Professor Wood, a former Australian of the Year, said her concern was that despite widespread knowledge that the best immediate first aid for a burn was cold water, only 29 per cent of patients admitted to hospital had received adequate first aid.

Pouring cold water on the burn site for 20 minutes while awaiting hospital care could mean the difference between clean healing and lifelong scarring, she said.

She said there was a complacency that modern treatment could fix even serious burns, but such attitudes failed to recognise the suffering burns caused.

Professor Wood said that she tells teenagers who have to have reconstructive surgery after burns in infancy: "You don't remember the pain but your mum and dad will never forget."

While modern safety measures for kettles and other hot appliances had reduced burn risks to children, 26 per cent of all patients admitted with burns injuries are children.

New risks had emerged, Professor Wood said, such as friction burns caused to children by the belts on exercise machines.

The president of the Australian New Zealand Burns Association, Heather Cleland, warned of another more disastrous source of burns. "There is a considerable risk for a disaster involving significant numbers of burns casualties to occur in Australia and New Zealand," she said.

"The Bali bombings and the 2009 Victorian bushfires are testament to this and demonstrated the ability of our burns services to respond to the needs of our community."

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/hot-liquids-leading-cause-of-burns-for-children-20120201-1qtig.html>