



# INJURY BULLETIN

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## CHILDREN'S BURNS FROM HOT BEVERAGE SPILLS

More than a third (37%) of the burns children receive in and around the home are the direct result of tea, coffee or other hot beverages being spilt on them either by themselves, other children or adults.

Quite apart from the immediate pain and distress associated with this type of injury, burns can cause long term suffering as a result of scarring, contractures and the resultant psychological trauma.

Each year, 16% of these injuries result in hospital admission. A further 75% are sufficiently serious to require ongoing medical attention. The body parts most frequently burnt are the chest and/or shoulders.

Children in the 0 to 4 years age group are injured by hot beverage spills more frequently than older children. Children aged 1 to 2 years are at particular risk which is understandable considering the developmental tendency at this age to reach out and grab for anything in sight!

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\* QISU data is based on emergency department presentations to the following hospitals: Mater Children's Hospital, Mater Adult Hospital, Mater Private Emergency Care Centre, Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Hospital, Redland Hospital, Logan Hospital, Royal Children's Hospital, Mt Isa Hospital and Mackay and district hospitals.

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The most common place for this sort of injury to occur is in the kitchen or living room.

The most common explanations for this sort of injury was that the hot liquid was “**knocked over**” or “**left in a dangerous position**“ or that the injury involved some sort of “**collision**” or someone “**tripping**”. These four descriptions of the injury scene account for 96% of all burns from hot beverage spills and implicitly suggest a number of possible preventive strategies.

Clearly, children and hot beverages are not a good combination. Care should be taken regarding (a) the placement of the beverage and (b) the behaviour of nearby children.

Cups of tea and coffee etc. should be **placed well out of reach** of young children.

Nevertheless, care should be taken to **supervise** children to ensure they don't find a way to reach the beverage.

Cups should be placed on something **stable**.

Young children should be prevented from pulling themselves to a standing position on a table containing a hot beverage.

Cups should not be placed in a thoroughfare position, e.g. on the floor next to a chair.

Older children should be made aware of the presence and position of hot beverages and asked to behave carefully.

Older children should be warned to keep out of the path of a person carrying, tea, coffee etc.

It is safer not to drink hot tea or coffee while holding a young child on your lap.

Loose boards, badly fitting floor coverings, scatter rugs (particularly on polished floors) and other items that might cause trips, slips or falls should be removed from all areas, but particularly from areas where hot food and beverages are carried and handled.