



BC Children's Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, provides expert care for the province's most seriously ill or injured children, including newborns and adolescents. Children's is an academic health centre affiliated with the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, and the Child & Family Research Institute. For more information, please visit www.bcchildrens.ca.

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians. For more information, please visit www.phsa.ca.

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PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

What parents need to know about gas fireplaces November 5, 2007

Vancouver, B.C. – When Grace was just 10 months old, she climbed onto the hearth of a gas fireplace, stood up, and placed her hands on the super-heated glass front. Grace sustained serious burns to her palms and fingers and endured painful daily dressing changes for weeks. Her burns were so severe that Grace required skin grafts, casts, and pressure gloves. Grace's story is not unique. Many children like Grace require painful dressings, visits to doctors and clinics, and post-healing scar monitoring that bring them and their families to BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver. Now eight years old, Grace recently returned to Children's as part of her long-term follow-up care.

Every year, there is a new group of first-time parents who are unaware of the risks of gas fireplaces. B.C. has one of the highest fireplace per capita rates in North America, and every year dozens of children with fireplace glass burns to their hands or faces are admitted to BC Children's Hospital for treatment. And that number appears to be growing.

With winter coming, new parents and caregivers need to appreciate that glass-fronted gas fireplaces can get as hot as 450-600 degrees F (lasagna bubbles at 350!). Children are attracted to the toddler-height glass and the flickering flame. Because the heat in front of the fireplace glass appears minimal, they can easily touch the glass or fall against it, without warning.

"In my experience, most kids are burned with their parents in the same room, who are just not able to 'get there' in time," says Dr. Cynthia Verchere, Plastic Surgeon and Medical Director of the BC Children's Hospital Burn Unit. "It takes less than a second to deeply burn the skin of the palm or face with the high heat of the glass, and sometimes the kids can't pull themselves away."

Parents and caregivers should avoid using gas fireplaces when young children are near. Gas fireplaces take 30 to 45 minutes to cool down after the fire is off, so turn them off well in advance of children's visits, and teach children not to touch the glass, even if they don't see flames.

Fireplace manufacturers are increasingly designing attractive, secure, and even integral screens to prevent burns, and Dr. Verchere advises parents to get one. "Our job is to teach people why they need a screen," she emphasizes. "It's like using car seats and seatbelts—there is an inconvenience and expense, but the safety issue should always prevail."

Gas fireplace technology is improving every year. But if your first child is now a toddler, or you have visiting grandchildren, you need to know how to protect them from serious burns. To learn more about gas fireplace screens, contact your fireplace manufacturer, or visit www.hpba.org to locate one near you.

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- Digital images of burns are available.
- Interviews are available with Dr. Cynthia Verchere, BC Children's Hospital, a patient family, and a spokesperson from the Hearth Patio & Barbecue Association of Canada.