



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. BC 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

Expert warns parents to keep children away from gas fireplaces

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Vancouver, B.C. – Every year, BC Children's Hospital treats a dozen children with serious burns to their hands or face sustained from touching the glass in front of gas fireplaces. Many of those children endure painful dressings, skin grafts, casts, and pressure gloves, multiple visits to doctors and clinics, and post-healing scar monitoring that bring them and their families back to BC Children's long after the accident. It takes only seconds for a young child to climb onto the hearth of a gas fireplace, stand up, and placed his or her hands on the super-heated glass front.

"Most of the kids we treat 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."

Every year, there is a new group of first-time parents who are unaware of the risks of gas fireplaces. With the cold weather here, BC Children's cautions new parents and caregivers to be aware of the risks of gas fireplaces. Glass-fronted gas fireplaces can get as hot as 450-600 degrees F (lasagna bubbles at 350!). Young 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.

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.

B.C. has one of the highest fireplace per capita rates in North America, and fireplace manufacturers are increasingly designing attractive, secure, and even integral screens to prevent burns. 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.

Visit the Safety Station in the lobby of BC Children's Hospital to purchase a hearth gate or fireplace door guard, or go to www.bcchildrens.ca/safetystation to learn more. You can also contact your fireplace manufacturer, or visit www.hpba.org to locate one near you.

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- Digital images of burns are available.
- Dr. Cynthia Verchere is available for interviews.