



part of Children's & Women's Health Centre of British Columbia

NEWS RELEASE

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Fireplace burns in children up 75 per cent

Vancouver – As temperatures drop, we're turning up the heat in our homes, which is why BC's Children's Hospital is warning parents to take precautions with their gas and wood-burning fireplaces. The surface temperature of most fireplaces in use during the winter months can reach 200° Celsius (390° F). That's hot enough to cook a turkey and almost twice the boiling point of water.

Last year, sixteen children were treated at BC's Children's Hospital Emergency for fireplace burns – a 75 per cent jump over the average for the previous four years. Since 1998, Children's Emergency has treated 52 children for burns caused by hot fireplaces, and almost three quarters of the patients were one year of age or younger. Almost all of the patients were burned by hot surfaces – not open flames.

Thirteen-month-old Riley Ryder of Courtenay, B.C. was playing near the fireplace when her three-year-old sister accidentally triggered the 'on' switch. Before her parents knew what had happened, Riley fell against the glass – sustaining second-degree burns to her nose and top lip and third-degree burns to the entire surface of both palms. She was rushed to hospital in Comox and later transferred to Children's by air ambulance. "It only takes a second for an accident like this to occur," warns Steve Ryder, Riley's father. "None of our family and friends realized how hot the glass front of a fireplace can get. It ignites using a simple switch and has no screen to prevent children from touching it, making it very easy for children to get burned."

Burns are the most painful and traumatic of childhood injuries. "Already this year we've seen two fireplace-related burns that needed grafting or significant healing time," says Dr. Cindy Verchere, Medical Director of Children's Burn Unit, which treats B.C.'s most severe paediatric burn cases. "Most fireplace-related burns result from babies pulling themselves up or falling against the glass or insert. The hands, fingers, and face are the body parts most likely to be injured."

Anne Williams operates the Safety Station outreach centre at Children's. Part of the hospital's injury prevention program, the centre specializes in child-proofing advice and consumer product safety. "We have been warning the public about the safety of glass-enclosed fireplaces for some time," says Williams. "It's hard to believe that something so commonly found in our homes can do this kind of damage. More parents need to be warned of the potential gas fireplaces have for causing serious injury."

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For more information, contact
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BACKGROUNDER

Many parents do not realize the potential that glass-enclosed fireplaces pose for severe burns. There are no flickering, exposed flames to send a warning signal of “HOT!” to curious outstretched fingers. Fooled by the inviting, seemingly ‘televised’ image sealed behind a window, babies’ instincts tell them it is safe to play near or touch the blistering hot glass.

The Safety Station offers these choices for reducing your baby’s risk of a fireplace burn:

- Turn the appliance off when your baby is active and turn it back on when he or she is sleeping.
- Vigilantly supervise your baby or toddler in any room with an active gas fireplace or wood stove, and for at least 45 minutes after the appliance is shut off to allow time for the surface to cool.
- Put up a permanent screen or gate if you use the fireplace as a constant source of heat. Screens are sold in most fireplace stores and cost between \$100 - \$200. The Safety Station sells hardware-mounted gates for surrounding wood stoves and fireplaces for between \$150 - \$250.

If your child does get burned, Dr. Verchere offers the following advice: “Immediate cooling is the best response and seconds can make a difference. Immerse the burned area in cold running water for several minutes until it feels cool to the touch. Never apply ointment as it won’t reverse the burning process, or ice cubes, which can cause frost bite. Cover the burn with a clean bandage. If blisters appear, make an appointment to see your family doctor. If the burn is more serious and covers a larger area than the tips of one or two fingers, take your child to the nearest emergency department right away.”

For more childproofing and product safety tips, visit www.cw.bc.ca/safetystation or call 604-875-2244 (toll-free across B.C. 1-888-331-8100).