

Sun & Safety: Have Fun, Avoid Burns

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Easy-to-Follow Advice from UC San Diego Medical Center Experts

School's out. Summer's in full swing. And celebrations are underway! The staff at the UC San Diego Medical Center would like to remind the community of some simple but helpful precautions.

Hot Coals

Anyone who walks or falls on hot coals can be severely burned and a child can sustain life-threatening burns. Hot coals should always be disposed of in designated containers at the beach or bay. Do not bury coals with sand. Hot coals covered by sand can retain an intense heat for up to 24 hours.

If a child is burned by hot coals, immediately cool the area but DO NOT use ice. Never apply ice to a burn. Nurse practitioner Jason McSweeney, from the UCSD Regional Burn Center recommends using "...cold water to cool the burn and, at the same time, wash away the sand and debris. If there is time, apply an antibiotic ointment, but get right to the emergency room."

Fireworks

Fireworks are illegal in San Diego County and extremely dangerous, especially those purchased in Mexico. Each year the UCSD Regional Burn Center treats patients who have suffered fire-works related injuries, including those from small fireworks called "poppers" that easily fit in a pocket, where they can explode, set clothing on fire, and cause serious burn injuries.

Lamp Oil and Lighter Fluid

Oil-filled lamps or torches on patios and backyards can cause severe burns if not properly secured, but there is another aspect of using these devices that often goes overlooked. The fluids involved can cause life-threatening pneumonia in young children and adults if the fuel is inhaled.

Each year, the Poison Center receives an average of 400 calls regarding the ingestion of lamp oil and lighter fluid, the majority of which involve children under the age of five.

“A common source of exposure occurs when lamp oil or lighter fluid is placed in a drinking cup or other container in order to transfer it to the lamp, torch or barbecue,” said Richard Clark, M.D., UCSD Emergency Department and Medical Director, California Poison Control System (CPCS).

Never transfer lamp oil or lighter fluid in a container normally used for eating or drinking. Lamp oil and lighter fluid should be stored in the original, child-resistant packaging and insure the lid is securely tightened and out of the reach of children immediately after use.

Sun & Skin

The UCSD Regional Burn Center treats many children and adults with severe sunburns during the summer season.

Many people doze off while lying in the sun at the beach, by the bay or the pool. Even if the weather is not extremely hot, severe sunburn can occur on gloomy days due to the intensity of the ultraviolet rays and sun, reflected off the water, is even more intense and can lead to more serious burns.

“Most burns caused by the sun are first degree burns,” says McSweeney. “But each year, we see at least a dozen cases where the patient is burned so badly that it begins to blister. A handful of those are admitted to the Burn Center for inpatient care.”

Brian Jiang, M.D., Associate Clinical Professor in the Division of Dermatology in the School of Medicine recommends wearing sunscreen with a UVA/UVB protection factor of *at least* 15. Apply sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before going outside, and re-apply every 2 hours. Wear a wide brim hat and tightly woven clothing. The American Association of Dermatologists (AAD) has approved certain brands which are good for sun protection.

It is generally recommended that children of all ages be kept out of strong, prolonged sunlight; however, sunscreen can be safely used from age six months forward. If for some reason it is unavoidable for an infant to be in the sunlight, sunscreen is probably safe at any age.

Sun & Sight

Sunglasses are sunscreens for the eyes. Without sunglasses, the eyes are unprotected from the harmful UV-A and UV-B rays of the sun. Sunglasses can be the main factor in saving your eyes from sight-ending diseases such as macular degeneration, cataracts or skin cancer around the eyelids. UCSD experts recommend comfortable sunglasses that reduce glare and filter out at least 99 percent of both UV-A and UV-B rays.

“Everyone is at risk for eye problems caused by the sun. Kids and adults,” said Stuart Brown, M.D., professor and Chair of the UCSD Department of Ophthalmology, and Director of the UCSD Shiley Eye Center. “So everyone should wear UV blocking sunglasses.”

UCSD Regional Burn Center burn safety quick tips:

- Store flammable liquids safely.
- Watch for hot tar and coals on the beach, and discard your own coals in a designated receptacle.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Never play games near a fire pit or campfire.
- Never use sand to extinguish a campfire. Sand insulates heat.
- Douse all campfires with water.
- Wear sun block whenever you are in the sun.

What to Do...?

- Do not put ice on small burns. Use cool water, and in the event of a serious burn, immerse the affected area in a bath of cool water.
- Always discard smoking materials in a deep or wet receptacle.
- Keep matches out of reach of children.

Please remember: Burn injuries can be serious. In case of a serious burn injury, call 911 for an emergency response.

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Media Contact: Kim Edwards, 619-543-6163, kedwards@ucsd.edu

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