



Burns prevention

Preventing burns in education and care settings is crucial to reducing injury risks for young children. This requires continuous risk assessments of both the environment and children's activities.

In Western Australia, serious burn incidents among young children have increased, often due to inadequate ongoing risk assessments by educators. Common causes include contact with hot surfaces, buckets of hot water used for cleaning, spilled hot liquids, and hot food.

Below is a list of what you need to consider when developing policies and practices to minimise burns risk and protect children.

Maintain a safe environment and continuously assess risks

- ✓ Conduct regular safety checks.
- ✓ Always ensure adequate supervision of all spaces and activities.
- ✓ Conduct thorough risk assessments for all activities and environments.
- ✓ Continuously reassess risks during transitions and activities.
- ✓ Vigilance, thorough risk assessments, clear communication, and high-level embedded best practices are crucial for minimising risk.
- ✓ Review and revise policies and practices following any incident.

Indoor environments

- ✓ Never take hot liquids into areas where there are children and save hot drinks for the staff room.
- ✓ It only takes a second for a child to sustain severe burns from hot liquids, as their skin is much more sensitive than an adult's.
- ✓ Be careful when serving hot food and microwaved bottles. Hot food and drink can not only burn the mouth but also the skin. Some foods, such as pasta and noodles, retain heat longer and can stick to the skin, increasing the risk of serious burns.

- ✓ If using hot water for cleaning, only do so after children have left the area.
- ✓ If using hot water for activities such as making playdough or cooking, only do so away from children.

Outdoor environments

- ✓ Remember to think about the surface temperature, not just the air temperature. Even on milder 20°C days, surfaces can reach in excess of 40°C. How will you test this?
- ✓ Check the temperature of outdoor surfaces and equipment right before allowing children to go outside to play.
- ✓ Even on overcast days, outdoor surfaces and equipment can become incredibly hot to the touch.
- ✓ The temperature of surfaces can fluctuate almost instantly by 10°C between times of cloud cover and sun.
- ✓ Pay special attention to composite decking, play equipment, and interlocking jigsaw mats. These are common causes of burns injuries.
- ✓ Store equipment in the shade.
- ✓ Just because something meets Australian Standards, does not mean it won't heat up or pose a risk to children.

Communicate policies and procedures effectively

- ✓ Ensure certain staff are given the time to read, understand and discuss the risk assessments.
- ✓ Ensure induction processes equip new educators with clear understanding of burns prevention risks.
- ✓ Include burns prevention as a standing agenda item in staff meetings.
- ✓ Undertake regular practice audits and implement changes as required.

Vehicles

- ✓ Alarming, every year in Australia, over 5,000 children are rescued after being left unattended in a vehicle (source: KidSafe).
- ✓ Even on a mild day, temperatures in closed vehicles can quickly rise to over 52°C.
- ✓ Body temperatures can double after just a few minutes, even with windows slightly open.
- ✓ In education and care settings, incidents involving children being left in vehicles are most commonly caused by failure to follow policies, complacency, poor implementation of routine practices, and a lack of governance.
- ✓ Ensure compliance with legislation by implementing required mechanisms, such as headcount documentation.

Resources

More resources on burns prevention are available:

- [Education and Care Regulatory Unit - other resources](#)
- [Burn Prevention Education & Resources - Fiona Wood Foundation](#)
- [Resources | Kidsafe WA](#)

Stay updated with new research

- ✓ Ensure all staff are informed of new studies and research, and update policies and procedures to reflect best practices.
- ✓ In 2023 ECRU engaged a material expert who shared findings with the education and care sector. These findings are as follows:

⚠ **At 40°C**, a surface will feel hot to the touch making most adults instinctively withdraw on contact. Children may have slower reaction times due to inexperience with burns, and their skin is more sensitive.

⚠ **At 44°C**, first-degree burns occur, causing pain and redness.

⚠ **At 52°C**, the skin can transition from a first-degree to second-degree burn, causing severe pain and typically results in tissue damage such as blistering.

⚠ **At 60°C**, the skin can sustain third-degree burns, also known as full thickness burns, which causes extreme pain and results in tissue damage.

Time of day	Air Temp (°C)	Composite timber from service (°C)	Other brand of composite timber (°C)	EVA Mat - Purple (°C)
0900	27	42	34	29
0930	29	50	44	30
1000	31	56	49	33
1100	32	60.5	52	34
1200	34	62	55	38
1300	34.5	65	56	38
1400	35	65	58	42
1500	36	66	61	44

Burns prevention requires focused attention and constant risk assessment by educators.

While some services have a formal risk assessment regarding burns prevention, these should not be relied upon in isolation. Remember to constantly ask yourself:

- Is it safe for each child?
- What are the best practices?
- Is the environment changing – becoming hotter or colder?
- Should we change our actions, environment, or activities to suit the changing conditions?

Burns prevention is your responsibility.

Burns prevention is considered under section 165 of the [Education and Care Services National Law \(WA\) Act 2012](#), and aligns with Quality Area 2 of the National Quality Standards (NQS).

For more information, please contact the team via email ECRU@communities.wa.gov.au or phone (08) 6277 3889 (Free call: 1800 199 383).