



Hot Tap Water Burns

Like Fire

How hot is the tap water in your home?

When we think about burns, we usually think “fire”.

However, hot liquids cause more burns than fire.

Scald burns are burns from hot liquids or steam, and are painful injuries - the treatment is agonizing and there can be life-long scarring. The tragedy of most hot water burns is that they don't have to happen – **they can be prevented.**

The temperature of hot water tanks in most Canadian homes is pre-set to 60 degrees Celsius (140 degrees Fahrenheit). Water at this temperature can cause severe burns to a child in less than one second. This child's foot was burned by hot tap water.

You can help prevent hot water burns by lowering the thermostat on your hot water heater to a safe setting, and taking the simple precautions outlined below.



What is a safe temperature?

The water from your hot water tap should be 49° C (120° F). Water hotter than this may burn a child's skin. Seniors, people who can't escape the hot water quickly, and people who can't feel the heat, are also at risk.

How can I find out the temperature of my hot tap water?

Turn on the hot water tap in your bathroom. Let it run for two minutes. If you have used a lot of hot water in the past hour, wait two hours before you do this test.

- ▶ Fill a cup with hot water. Place a thermometer that can show high temperatures, such as a meat or candy thermometer, in the cup.
- ▶ Wait 30 seconds. Look at the temperature reading on the thermometer. If it is higher than 49° C (120° F), you need to lower your water temperature.

If you have any questions about testing your hot water, call the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority at 926-7042.

How can I lower the temperature of my hot water?

Turn down the setting on your hot water heater. You should find the thermostat dial on the outside of the heater. If the dial has numbers on it, turn it down to 49° C or 120° F. If the dial has words, such as Hot, Warm, and Vacation, turn it to the Warm setting. If you cannot easily see or adjust the thermostat, call a licensed plumber.

Once you have lowered the temperature, wait 24 hours, and then test the water again.

What can I do if I live in an apartment or rental unit?

- ▶ Speak to your property manager or landlord about lowering the hot water temperature to 49° C.
- ▶ Use anti-scald devices that fit on sink spouts, bathtub spouts and showerheads, if the temperature of the hot water in your building cannot be lowered. For more information on where to buy these devices, call 926-7042.

Are there any people who should not lower their hot water temperature?

People who have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or extremely weak immune systems should check with their doctor before lowering their hot water temperature. This includes...

- ▶ people with HIV/AIDS
- ▶ people with cancer
- ▶ transplant and other patients taking immuno-suppressive drugs
- ▶ people with genetically weakened immune systems

What special care should I take when bathing my child?

- ▶ Keep your child out of the bathtub while you are filling the tub.
- ▶ Run cold water into the tub first, and then run warm, but not hot water until you reach a comfortable temperature. This will prevent a scald burn if your child falls into the tub while it is being filled. Always finish by filling the tub with cold water to prevent your child from being burned by the hot bathtub spout.
- ▶ Mix the water with your hand to get rid of hot spots.
- ▶ Use your elbow to check the temperature before you place your child in the tub. If the water feels hot, it is too hot for your child.
- ▶ Face your child away from the water taps and keep him/her closer to the other end of the tub (away from the taps).
- ▶ Never leave your young child in the bathtub with an older child who may be able to turn on the hot water tap.
- ▶ Stay in the bathroom when your child is in the bathtub. If you must leave to answer the door or phone, take your child with you, wrapped in a towel.
- ▶ Drain the bathtub immediately after use.
- ▶ Use extreme caution if bathing your child in the sink. Many sinks have single lever taps that are easy for small children to turn on.

What should I do if my child, or anyone else, is scalded?

- ▶ Place the part of the body that is scalded (skin may be red and swollen) in cold water, or cover it with cold wet cloths until the pain stops (after about 15 minutes).
- ▶ If redness, pain, or blistering lasts more than 30 minutes, go to the emergency department.
- ▶ Do NOT apply cream, ointment, butter, oil, or ice.

Where can I get more information on how to protect my child from scalds and burns?

- ▶ Call your local Winnipeg Regional Health Authority community health office
- ▶ Visit these web sites:
www.safekidscanada.ca/english/safety_tips/st_protect_kids_from_scalds.html
www.wrha.mb.ca

