

Loss Control Insights

EMERGENCY BURN INJURY CARE

Decisions made in the minutes and hours immediately following a burn injury can save the life and or improve the outcome of the patient. Emergency treatment is dependent on the burning agent (flames, chemicals or electricity) and the severity (minor versus moderate to severe) of the burn.



Minor Burns. Minor burns — which generally means sunburns and thermal burns that are superficial (first degree) or partial thickness (second degree) depth and are smaller than the palm of the hand and do not affect substantial portions of the face, hands, feet or perineum — can usually be treated as follows:

- Apply cool running water or cold compresses to thermal burns (burns from external heat sources such as flames and hot liquids) for a few minutes. Do not apply ice or ointments or pop any blisters.
- Keep the burn clean and dry with loosely sterile coverings.
- Manage pain with over-the-counter medication. If pain, blistering or signs of infection persist, contact a physician.

Moderate to Severe Burns. For moderate to severe burns, it is important to call 911 or seek medical attention right away. Moderate to severe burn injuries can include:

- Burns larger than the size of the palm
- Burns involving substantial portions of the eyes, ears, face, hands, feet or perineum
- Burns that are grey, white, or leathery in appearance and/or painless, indicating a deep partial thickness or full thickness burn
- Suspected smoke inhalation injuries
- All chemical and electrical burns, as damage is not always immediately obvious

While waiting for help to arrive, the following steps are recommended:

- Do not remove burnt clothing
- Do not immerse large severe burns in cold water because it can cause shock
- Begin rescue breathing if the burn victim is not breathing (if you are trained in rescue breathing)
- Begin CPR if the burn victim has no detectable pulse and no signs of breathing, if you are CPR trained
- Elevate the burned body part or parts
- Cover the area of the burn with a cool, moist, sterile bandage; clean, moist cloth; or moist towels

Burning Agent. Special considerations related to the burning agent include:

- If the victim's clothing is on fire, extinguish flames using "stop, drop and roll."
- Due to the risk of shock or electrocution, those attending to electrical burn victims are advised not to touch the victim until the power source has been disconnected or the victim is otherwise free from the power source. Wait for help to arrive if there is any question as to the safety of the area surrounding the victim.
- For chemical burns, flush the skin for at least 20 minutes (longer if pain persists or as directed by medical personnel). Chemical burns in the eyes should be flushed continuously until help arrives. Dry chemicals should be brushed off the skin before flushing. Remove clothing and jewelry that has been exposed to the chemicals. Call poison control if there is any possibility the substance is toxic.