Children at risk of burns from steam vaporisers

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Steam emitted from humidifiers and vaporisers can pose a significant risk of burns to children, the 85th Annual Scientific Congress of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons has been told.

A research paper from the Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne, presented by Dr Sarah Lonie, currently a plastic surgery registrar at Royal Hobart Hospital, says that while steam vaporisers are used to humidify air in dry environments and are marketed to loosen chest congestion in young children to make breathing easier, the steam emitted from the unit can also pose a considerable risk of burns to young children.

“Our study focusses on ascertaining patterns of injury and treatment outcomes from steam burns resulting from these devices,” Dr Lonie said.

“Steam vaporisers can cause substantial burns in young children. Toddlers are most at risk, frequently sustaining hand burns requiring skin grafting,” the Hobart doctor said.

Children who had sustained vaporiser scald burns were identified at the outpatient burns clinic of Royal Children’s Hospital over a 10-month period from November 2014 to August 2015.

Medical records were reviewed retrospectively and data collected on pattern of injury, management and outcomes.

“Ten children were treated for vaporiser steam burns over the study period. The average age was 1.6 years and 80 per cent were young boys.

“Operations were required in 50 per cent of cases; four acutely and one as a secondary reconstructive procedure.

Hand burns accounted for 80 per cent of cases.

“The appropriate authorities must generate greater public awareness of the dangers of these devices and if your child suffers from one of these injuries it is important that you get them to your nearest hospital or medical centre for urgent treatment,” Dr Lonie said.

Over a thousand surgeons from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) as well as international surgeons from the Royal College of Surgeons of England are gathering at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre this week for a series of workshops, discussions, Plenaries and masterclasses across a broad range of surgical issues.

About RACS

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and

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