



FIRST AID DURING BUSHFIRES

It is recommended that at least one person in your household be trained in first aid. Contact the Ambulance Service or other accredited first aid training agency for information on first aid training courses.

Burns

The basic rules for burns are:

- Do not cover the burnt area with butter, antiseptics, ointments or creams.
- Do not break blisters.
- Do not try to remove burnt clothing that is stuck to the skin.

When helping burn victims, avoid becoming a victim yourself. Remove the patient from the danger area or, if this is not possible, remove the danger from the patient.

Do not handle the affected area.

Burns can be caused by radiated heat, actual flame contact, chemicals, electricity, contact with a heated object, toxic gases, super heated air, steam and other causes.

Burns from radiant heat can be serious. Any exposed skin can be susceptible.

When exposed skin begins to get very hot it is a sign that you are too close to the heat source and radiant heat burns are possible. Be aware that objects may also be heated by conduction.

Treatment

Cool the affected area immediately by immersing it in cool, clean water. If immersion is not possible, running water will do. Keep cooling the area until the affected skin has cooled below its burn temperature, at least ten minutes should be considered a minimum.

Deeper, full skin thickness burns require cooling for a longer period. Take care not to over-cool the victim as this could lead to further complications. Don't remove burnt clothing that is stuck to the skin.

After cooling the affected area, cover with a clean, dry, non-adhesive dressing.

Burns can be serious, seek immediate medical aid for major burns.

For more information on bushfire safety and home fire safety, visit the Rural Fire Service website at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or call the RFS Education Line on 1 800 654 443 (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm).



Scalds

Scalds are burns caused by steam or other heated vapours. Scalds should be treated in the same way as other burns - by cooling with water.

Cuts

The key to the treatment of major cuts is pressure and elevation. If possible elevate the bleeding part and then apply direct pressure over the wound with a pad, clean cloth, or preferably a wound dressing.

If bleeding does not stop, do not remove the original pad or dressing, apply additional dressings and pressure.

Minor cuts and abrasions can be cleaned with cool, clean water. Apply a dressing such as sterilised gauze or a bandage. If in doubt seek medical attention.

Eyes

Flying ash is often a problem near bush fires. Smoke goggles are recommended to prevent eye damage or discomfort.

It is useful to note that the presence of flying ash (particularly if it is coming towards you) is an indication that the fire is moving in your direction.

If ash or other debris lodges in your eye, irrigate with plenty of cool, clean water. If you suspect eye damage, seek medical assistance.

Airway burns

During fires, smoke and hot air may damage the delicate tissues of the airway causing swelling. The victim may need your assistance to breathe using Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). Everyone should learn CPR.

Heat stress

The body controls its temperature by changes in circulation patterns and by sweating. If you do not drink regularly during strenuous activity or in very hot weather, dehydration and heat stress will result.

DRINK WATER ONLY ... AND OFTEN.

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The symptoms of heat stress are:

- weakness
- dizziness
- nausea.

The treatment is:

- Remove the patient from the heat.
- Sit the patient in the shade.
- Loosen clothing, create air movement by fanning.
- Give regular sips of water.

Heat stroke

If heat stress is not treated promptly, heat stroke can result. **Heat stroke is life threatening.**

The symptoms of heat stroke are:

- high temperature
- flushed face
- hot dry skin....sweating stops
- rapid and strong pulse.

URGENT MEDICAL ATTENTION IS REQUIRED

Treatment for suspected heat stroke:

- Call the Ambulance Service on 000.
- Put the patient in the shade.
- Remove or loosen clothing.
- Sponge with plenty of cool water, create air movement by fanning.

Every minute's delay in cooling the patient increases the likelihood of permanent injury or death. Give the patient frequent drinks of water (if conscious). Hospitalisation is necessary.

Preparation, care and compliance with safe working practices are the essential ingredients necessary to avoid injury. First aid training will help you to help others - enrol in a first aid course today.

Produced by the NSW Rural Fire Service in co-operation with The Ambulance Service of NSW.

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