

Chem-lab accident: a review of burn injuries at school

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Key Words

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Introduction

Chemical burn injury occurs infrequently, accounts for 1.2% of burns in the paediatric age group and represents 0.9% of burns within "school, other institution, public administrative areas".¹

We present a 16-year-old girl who accidentally splashed concentrated sulphuric acid during an experiment resulting in partial thickness burns to forehead, left forearm and both lower limbs. We draw focus on the interventions taken by her school, and present data pertaining specifically to chemical burns in children and a focus on all reported burn injuries at school.

Methods

A retrospective review over a 5-year period, from January 2010 to December 2014 was performed at a major paediatric burns referral centre.

Results

Twenty-two cases of chemical burn injury in the paediatric population were identified. The majority of these cases were managed in an outpatient setting (64%) and remainder were admitted for ongoing management (36%). Boys represented 64% of presentation, and age group <10 years represented the majority of cases (76%). Sulphuric acid and caustic soda were the two most common causative agents.

In a separate review we identified 19 cases of burn injury at school. Boys again represented the majority (58%), with injury occurring in those >10 years of age (89%). Contact burn (43%) injury was most common, followed by flame (21%) and scald (21%).

Conclusion

Burn injuries occurring at school though infrequent is theoretically preventable and appropriate supervision is crucial at all times. Students should routinely undergo burn injury first aid education and reminded of the role of personal protective equipment (PPE).

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