Safe Bathing – Prevention of scalding and drowning

Relevant Legislation

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HASWA)
Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (as amended) (MHSWR)

Introduction

The risk to vulnerable adults and children from scalding and drowning during bathing is well known. There have been a number of serious and fatal accidents in this activity, so it is especially important that all necessary precautions are put in place.

Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to raise awareness of the risks of scalding and drowning of vulnerable adults and children and the arrangements that must be put in place to minimise those risks.

Scope

This procedure applies whenever vulnerable adults and children might be bathed, showered or washed by employees and/or agency workers. This includes care settings, day services, children’s centres, nursery settings, children’s homes, special schools, and any other setting in which people may need assistance with bathing.

Those involved in commissioning services should note the contents of this procedure and ensure that social and healthcare providers are required to have similar arrangements in place to manage the risks of scalding and drowning.

The Risks

Scalding

High water temperatures pose a scalding risk and if hot water used for showering or bathing is above 44°C there is an increased risk of serious injury or fatality. Those at particular risk from scalding include babies and infants, young children, the elderly, those individuals with reduced mental capacity, reduced mobility and anyone with sensory impairment, or who cannot react appropriately, or quickly enough, to prevent injury.

Drowning

Babies topple and roll easily and young children may not understand the risks associated with even small amounts of water, a baby can drown in less than 3cm of water. Older people or people with mental or physical impairments may become submerged and drowned if unattended – e.g. those who have seizures, those with poor or weak muscle strength, etc.
Oxfordshire County Council managed buildings including schools

In accordance with the Council’s ‘Water Services Hygiene, Legionellosis and Scalding Policy’ Property and Facilities/Carillion will ensure a **general assessment of the premises** is carried out to identify what controls are necessary overall, and how the water systems should be managed and maintained.

**Managers/Headteachers Responsibilities**

Managers must supplement the general assessment of the premises and carry out a **specific individual risk assessment** of the potential scalding and drowning risks in the context of those being bathed.

Questions to be asked as part of the specific individual risk assessment include:

- Is the temperature of the supplied hot water controlled in some way?
- Is hot water easily accessible, e.g. bathroom, public or communal facility, kitchen?
- Is the adult/child physically capable of turning on the taps/shower?
- Is the adult/child likely to try and run a shower or bath/add water when unattended, e.g. ensuite bathrooms? (This is a particular issue for confused service users and those with dementia)
- Can the adult/child get in/out, sit up and/or wash themselves unaided?
- Is the adult/child’s sensitivity to temperature impaired?
- Is the adult/child’s mental state such that they can recognise and react to water that is too hot?
- Is the adult/child’s mobility impaired so restricting their ability to move out/away from hot water?
- Is the adult/child’s physical condition such that they can self-support themselves in a bath or shower?
- Is the adult/child capable of summoning assistance if needed?
- Will any lifting or other aids limit the adult or child’s mobility in the bath/shower?
- Is the adult/child at risk of drowning e.g. through age, seizure?
- Are there any risks to the carer e.g. manual handling etc.?

To prevent scalding, managers must ensure the following precautions are in place and there are systems to monitor these:

- **All baths and showers where vulnerable adults and children are being bathed or showered must be fitted with an appropriate Thermostatic Mixing Valve (TMV) or equivalent so that water cannot be delivered at temperatures that may cause scalding** (see page 5, table 1 Maximum temperatures).
- Warning notices must be placed in bathrooms instructing all employees/agency workers to check water temperature before immersing or showering a vulnerable adult or child, an example is included in ANNEX I.
- All carers including new employees and agency staff assisting in bathing must have sufficient training and experience and knowledge to enable them to undertake the task safely and this must be recorded.

**A suitable thermometer must always be used to check the temperature of the water before each bath/shower takes place.**

A water temperature sheet or log must be maintained giving:
Date; Time; Name of Employee (carer); Service user’s name; Bathing location; Water temperature (°C); Carer’s Signature. An example is included in ANNEX II.

Regular checks are made of the water temperature sheet/log to ensure temperatures are not excessive.

- Managers are responsible for ensuring that a maintenance regime is in place for all associated equipment e.g. hoists as well as the TMV’s which may be arranged via Property and Facilities/Carillion.

- Adequate training and supervision must be provided to ensure that staff assist vulnerable individuals, understand the risks and precautions.

**Employee/Agency Worker Responsibilities**

When assisting a vulnerable person to bathe employees/carers must:

- Understand and adhere to relevant training, safety procedures and any instructions arising from the risk assessment.
- Always use a safe system of work by following the *Bathing, showering and washing of vulnerable adults and children Procedure* (page 5).
- **Check water temperature with a thermometer** before use to ensure it is safe.
- Allow or assist the vulnerable person to enter the bath or shower safely.
- Where applicable use special baths and any associated equipment such as hoists and slings etc.
- Follow any advice given to manage any special needs or behavioural difficulties that the vulnerable person has.
- Follow First Aid and Emergency procedures.

**Schools – Installation and Maintenance Costs**

Headteachers/Governing Bodies must ensure through their delegated responsibilities and budgets that all actions identified within the scalding risk assessment are implemented including installation and servicing of engineering controls e.g. TMV’s.

**Social Care Providers (incl. residential)**

All social care providers should have arrangements in place to assess the risks of scalding and drowning and to ensure suitable engineering and management controls have been provided and are adequately maintained.

**Engineering Controls – Water Temperature Control**

Engineering controls should be provided to ensure that water hotter than stated in table 1 is not discharged from any outlet that may be accessible to vulnerable people.

Types of engineering controls include:

- Type 3 thermostatic mixing valves (TMVs), these should be located as close to the outlet as possible.
- Healthcare (BEAB CARE) approved showers.

All engineering controls must be installed, tested and maintained in accordance with manufacturer’s instructions by a competent person/contractor.
Social care provided in a private, domestic household

The requirement to fit devices (e.g. thermostatic mixer valves) would not necessarily apply to all private domestic premises. Social care providers may need to seek agreement with the person receiving care or in control of the premises to ensure systems for reducing the risk of scalding are in place and the risk is adequately controlled, so far as is reasonably practicable.

For further information:

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<tr>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Email and web addresses</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Specialist:</strong></td>
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<td>Health &amp; Safety Executive</td>
<td>Scalding and burning</td>
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<td>Managing the risk from hot water and surfaces in health and social care</td>
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<td>UK Homecare Association</td>
<td>Controlling scalding risks from bathing and showering</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.ukhca.co.uk/pdfs/BathingShowering.pdf#search=%22scalding%22">http://www.ukhca.co.uk/pdfs/BathingShowering.pdf#search=&quot;scalding&quot;</a></td>
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<td>Department of Health</td>
<td>Health Technical Memorandum 04-01: The control of Legionella, hygiene,</td>
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<td>“safe” hot water, cold water and drinking water systems</td>
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<td>Thermostatic Mixing Valve Association</td>
<td>General information on TMV's</td>
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<td>Intertek (BEAB-Care)</td>
<td>General information on electric care approved showers</td>
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<td>General:</td>
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<td>OCC Health &amp; Safety Team</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:healthandsafetyhelp@oxfordshire.gov.uk">healthandsafetyhelp@oxfordshire.gov.uk</a></td>
<td>03300 240849</td>
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**Issue:** October 2015
Procedure: Bathing, showering and washing of vulnerable adults and children

Table 1. Maximum Temperatures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Risk Rating</th>
<th>Maximum Hot Water Temperatures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bath</td>
<td>High (Full body immersion)</td>
<td>44°C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shower</td>
<td>High (Full body immersion incl. face)</td>
<td>41°C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washbasin</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>41°C</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bidet</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>38°C</td>
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**Babies and Infants:** When bathing or washing babies and infants the recommended safe water temperature is body temperature (36.4°C).

All vulnerable adults or children should be bathed in the following way:

- Adequate supervision and assistance must be provided whilst they are bathing/showering in accordance with the risk assessment.
- Where bathing is assisted/supervised carers must have everything ready before the person gets into the bath or shower, so that they need not be left alone: soap, facecloths, towels etc.
- Carers must never leave a baby or young child unattended, even to get a towel or a nappy.
- Where a TMV is not fitted the carer should start the bath or shower by turning on the cold water first before adding hot water.
- **Ensure that the bathing water does not exceed the maximum temperatures specified above (table 1) before the person is immersed.** Always check with a thermometer before the person is immersed in the water and record in the temperature log sheet even when a TMV is fitted.
- In the event of recording high temperatures at an outlet indicating a possible TMV failure then this should be recorded in the temperature log, and escalated to the line manager immediately for corrective action to be taken. Where possible the water supply should be isolated and warning signs displayed and the provision withdrawn from service whenever possible.
- Bath water should never be more than 6-8cm deep for babies and no higher than waist high for older children (sitting). Do not overfill the bath.
- Where appropriate use any lifting equipment (hoist) which is available. Always follow the instructions for use provided. The Manager’s advice must be sought if there is a lack of clarity about the use of the equipment. Slings must be suitable for the individual.
- Products like bubble bath or oil make baths slippery; ensure the bath is fitted with a non-slip mat.
- Seats and supports may also be available to help wash safely; these must be used where provided but only if appropriate.
- Do not allow vulnerable adults or children to stand or sit on the edge of the bath.
- Be vigilant and in the event of an emergency follow the advice given in **ANNEX III** or other specific locally determined arrangements.

All staff involved in the assistance or supervision of bathing or showering of vulnerable adults and children must sign the risk assessment to say they have read and understood these instructions.

Please discuss any concerns or comments about this procedure with your manager.

**ANNEX I** Example: Safe Bathing Instruction Notices
**ANNEX II** Bathing & Showering Temperature Log
**ANNEX III** Emergency & First Aid Procedure
Notice
Keeping safe when having a bath

When filling a bath...

...always fill the bath by turning on the cold water first before adding the hot water.

...do not overfill the bath – use only the amount of water necessary to bathe.

Before getting into a bath...

... check the temperature of the water with a thermometer to ensure it is not too hot. The temperature must not be above:
44°C for Adults
36.4°C for Babies and children

...record this using the temperature log.
Notice
Keeping safe when having a shower

When turning on a shower...

... always start the shower by turning on the cold water first before increasing the hot water.

Before getting into a shower...

... Check the temperature of the water with a thermometer to ensure it is not too hot. The temperature must not be above:
41°C for Adults
36.4°C for Babies and children

......record this using the temperature log
# Health and Safety Procedure

## ANNEX II Bathing & Showering Temperature Log

Employees / Agency Workers **MUST** follow the safe bathing procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Name of Employee / Agency Worker</th>
<th>Name of Adult/Child bathing/washing</th>
<th>Bathing Location e.g. Main Bathroom or Ensuite</th>
<th>Bath (Tick)</th>
<th>Shower (Tick)</th>
<th>Temp °C</th>
<th>Comments /Observations</th>
<th>Signed</th>
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Annex III

Actions to be Taken in the Event of Epileptic Seizure, Loss of Consciousness or Fall in the Bath:

- Lift the service user's head clear from the water.
- Pull the plug out to drain the water.
- Call for assistance.
- Follow specific guidelines within the Epilepsy Risk Assessment/Care Plan.

First Aid Actions to be Taken in the Event of Scalding:

What to Look For:

If you think someone has a burn or scald, there are five key things to look for:

1. Red skin
2. Swelling
3. Blisters may form on the skin
4. The skin may peel
5. The skin may be white or scorched

What You Need to Do:

- Stop the burning getting any worse, by moving the casualty away from the source of heat.
- Start cooling the burn as quickly as possible. Run it under cool water for at least ten minutes or until the pain feels better. (Don't use ice, creams or gels – they can damage tissues and increase risk of infection).
- Assess how bad the burn is. It is serious if it is:
  - larger than the size of the casualty's hand
  - on the face, hands or feet, or
  - a deep burn
- **If it is serious, call 999** for emergency medical help.
- Remove any jewellery or clothing near the burn (unless it is stuck to it).
- Cover the burned area with kitchen cling film or another clean, non-fluffy material, like a clean plastic bag. This will protect from infection.
- If necessary, treat for shock.
- If you are unsure if the burn is serious then seek further medical advice.

This advice is taken from First aid tips and information - St John Ambulance: