

CHEMICAL BURNS

The information provided in this safety topic is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice or formal first aid training.

A **chemical burn** can be caused by exposure to many substances like strong acids, cleaning agents and gasoline. Typically, a worker is aware of the cause of the chemical burn, but sometimes the pain and redness may not develop until sometime later after the exposure.

As with other types of burns, it is important to determine whether it is a major or a minor burn.

- A **minor burn**, that doesn't require emergency medical attention, is limited to an area no larger than 3 inches in diameter and may involve some pain, swelling, blisters or superficial redness, similar to a sunburn.
- For **major burns** that are deep, larger than 3 inches in diameter or cover the hands, feet, face, groin, buttocks or a major joint, call 911 (or emergency services) or seek immediate medical care.



To treat a chemical burn, follow these steps.

1. **Remove the cause of the burn.** Flush the chemical off the skin with cool running water for at least 10 minutes. For dry chemicals, safely brush off any remaining material before flushing.
 2. **Remove clothing or jewelry** that has been contaminated by the chemical.
 3. **Bandage the burn.** Cover the burn with a sterile gauze bandage (not fluffy cotton) or a clean cloth. Wrap it loosely to avoid putting pressure on burned skin.
 4. **Flush again, if needed.** If you experience increased burning after the initial flushing, flush the burn area with water again for several more minutes.
- The most important practical skill that you can use in a life-threatening emergency is to call 911 (or emergency services) and request assistance.

Discussion

Image: 0001986 mark_vyz/Shutterstock.com

Do you know where the Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are and how to read them?

If someone gets a chemical burn, where is the best place at work to flush with water?