

FOR RELEASE 17 November 2025

NHS and British Burn Association Issue Public Safety Warning: Steam Inhalation Causes Burns

The NHS, in collaboration with the British Burn Association, is urging the public to avoid using **steam inhalation as a remedy for coughs and colds**, following a rise in burn injuries linked to the practice.

Each winter, NHS hospitals treat patients — especially **young children** — who have sustained **serious scalds and burns** from accidental hot water spills during steam inhalation. The burns often affect the **face, chest, tummy, and legs**, sometimes requiring long-term treatment or surgery.

The risk

- Steam inhalation can lead to severe burns.
- Children are particularly vulnerable.
- Hot water can spill suddenly, causing serious injury.

The evidence

There is **no strong scientific evidence** that steam inhalation helps relieve colds or blocked noses. Any relief experienced is **temporary** and does **not speed recovery**.

Safer alternatives

The NHS recommends safer and more effective ways to manage cold symptoms:

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Use decongestant sprays, vapour rubs, or salt water nasal rinses.
- Rest and allow your body to recover naturally.

Nicole Lee London and South East Burns Network Manager, NHS spokesperson, said:

“Steam inhalation continues to cause preventable injuries every year. We want to remind the public that this traditional remedy can do more harm than good — particularly for children. There are safer and more effective ways to manage cold symptoms.”

The NHS is encouraging the public to **avoid using bowls of hot water for inhalation** and to **share this message** to help prevent further injuries this winter.

For more information, visit **www.nhs.uk** or contact your local NHS Trust.

 **Twitter / X**

Goal: Quick, shareable safety reminders

Tone: Clear, authoritative, public health focus

Posts:

1.  **Steam inhalation can cause serious burns — especially in children.**

There's *no strong evidence* it helps with colds or blocked noses.

 Try safer alternatives: fluids, decongestant sprays, and rest.

#NHS #PublicSafety #BurnPrevention

2.  Each winter, NHS hospitals treat children with severe burns from steam inhalation.

Please don't risk it.

 Drink fluids

 Rest

 Use safe decongestants

#SteamInhalation #BurnAwareness #NHSAdvice

3. "A bowl of hot water isn't a harmless remedy — it's a burn risk."

Stay safe. Skip steam inhalation this winter.

#WinterHealth #NHS #BurnPrevention

Visuals:

- Use the campaign poster (the one you shared)
- Short animation of "Do / Don't"
- Quote graphic: "Steam inhalation does more harm than good"

 Facebook

Goal: Educate and engage families & communities

Tone: Informative, empathetic, family-focused

Post:

 **This winter, stay safe — skip steam inhalation.**

Steam inhalation can cause *serious burns*, especially in children. And there's *no good evidence* it helps colds or coughs.

 Safer ways to feel better:

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Try decongestant sprays or vapour rubs

- Rest and let your body recover

Every winter, NHS hospitals treat children with painful burns from hot water spills. Don't take the risk — steam inhalation does more harm than good.

#NHSTips #BurnSafety #WinterWellness

Visuals:

- NHS poster or infographic
 - Image of warm tea/water and tissues (safe comfort)
 - Short video testimonial from a clinician or burns specialist
-

Instagram

Goal: Visual impact and easy-to-share safety content

Tone: Gentle, caring, reassuring

Carousel Post idea (5 slides):

1. ❌ “Think steam helps your cold?”
2. ⚠️ “It can actually cause serious burns — especially to children.”
3. 💡 “There’s no strong evidence it helps recovery.”
4. ✅ “Try safer options: fluids, rest, and nasal sprays.”
5. ❤️ “Steam inhalation does more harm than good. Stay safe this winter.”

Reel idea:

A 15–30s reel with a calm voiceover:

- “Many people think steam inhalation helps colds — but it can lead to painful burns.”
- Show NHS clinician explaining safe alternatives.

Hashtags:

#NHSTips #PublicHealth #BurnPrevention #WinterHealth #StaySafe

TikTok (if used by NHS Trust / campaign)

Goal: Quick myth-busting content

Tone: Friendly, educational

Video ideas:

1. “Myth vs Fact”

- Myth: Steam inhalation clears your cold faster.
- Fact: It can cause serious burns — and doesn’t help recovery!

2. Clinician Q&A

- A burns nurse or GP explains why steam is risky and suggests safer options.

3. “Don’t try this at home” clip**

- Show a pot of steaming water with warning overlay: “Looks harmless? Think again.”

Hashtags:

#NHSAdvice #SteamInhalation #HealthTips #BurnSafety #ColdAndFluSeason

Please see poster below -



PUBLIC SAFETY ALERT

STEAM INHALATION CAUSES BURNS

Don't risk burns for coughs and colds

The risk

- ! Steam inhalation can lead to serious burns
- ! Children are most at risk
- ! Hot water spills suddenly, causing burns on the face, chest, tummy and legs



The evidence

- ! No strong evidence that steam inhalation helps colds or blocked noses
- ! Any relief is temporary and doesn't speed recovery

Safer alternatives

- ✓ Drink plenty of fluids
- ✓ Consider decongestant sprays, vapour rubs, salt water nose rinses
- ✓ Rest and allow your body to recover



The NHS admits patients with burns from steam inhalation every winter

Steam inhalation does more harm than good