

Exercise caution to avoid firecracker accidents

TNN | Oct 23, 2014, 06.29AM IST



PUNE: The number of firecracker-related injuries is increasing every year despite the numerous awareness campaigns. Not just children, the victims also include unaware passersby and onlookers. Moreover, inhaling the fumes emitted by firecrackers worsens pre-existing conditions like asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, said medical experts.

Firecracker-related injuries range from burned fingers and lacerations to serious disability and permanent loss of vision. "When it comes to lighting firecrackers, everyone needs to be on guard," said critical care expert Kapil Borawake.

While small crackers can cause mild burns on the skin, eyelashes or eyelids, heavy crackers like rockets and atom bombs can cause serious damage to the cornea (front portion of the eye), bleeding inside the eye, tear and detachment of the retina and injury to the optic nerve leading to permanent loss of vision.

Firecracker-related injuries are on the rise mainly due to carelessness and ignorance, pointed out Aditya Kelkar, eye surgeon. "Eyes are vulnerable and can easily sustain an injury from a firecracker. If there is a burn injury to the eye, cover it with a sterile cotton pad and go to a hospital immediately. If there is a penetrating injury, don't wash the eyes. But if a small particle enters the eye, wash the eye with clean water and consult an ophthalmologist," said Kelkar.

"Children are particularly vulnerable during Diwali since they are the most enthusiastic about lighting crackers," Sharad Agarkhedkar, president of the city chapter of Indian Medical Association. He said that children should be informed about the dangers involving firecrackers.

"People should make sure that a responsible adult is supervising the children," Agarkhedkar said.

The steady increase in cases of firecracker-related injuries also highlights the need to regulate firecracker use and to enforce safety precautions. One of the most effective measures would be to restrict bursting of fireworks in open spaces.

"Regulating the quality of firecrackers and promoting safety measures via schools and media will also have a positive impact," said eye surgeon Jeevan Ladi.

Most burns due to firecrackers injure the hands, face and eyes. "They are superficial and can be treated by dressing the wounds. But some burns are deep and require reconstructive surgery. Simple precautions can help avoid such burns," said experts from National Burns Centre, Navi Mumbai.

Bursting firecrackers also leads to a huge spike in the levels of gases like sulphur dioxide and nitric oxide in the air. "Inhaling high levels of sulphur dioxide not only causes new respiratory problems such as cough, breathlessness and irritation in the throat, but also worsens pre-existing conditions such as asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia," chest physician Sundeep Salvi of Chest Research Foundation .

Better safe than sorry

- * Let one person light a cracker at a time
- * Use a long candle or a sparkler to light firecrackers and keep the elbow joint straight
- * Keep buckets of water handy
- * Turn off the regulators of your cooking gas cylinders and do not keep them in open spaces
- * Protect your pets. Loud crackers can make pets jittery and they become violent
- * Use cotton ear plugs for infants
- * Don't ignite fireworks while holding them
- * Don't go near a cracker that fails to burst or tamper with misfired fireworks
- * Don't place crackers in a container while lighting them or carry fireworks in the pocket
- * Don't attempt to make fireworks at home
- * Never allow small children to handle fireworks
- * Keep firecrackers away from burning candles and earthen lamps
- * Light firecrackers in open areas
- * Wear thick cotton clothes, not synthetic materials. Secure all clothing, like dupattas and sarees

If case of a burn

- * Hold the wound under running tap water till the burning sensation subsides
- * If fingers or toes are burned, try and separate them with dry, sterile, non-adhesive dressings
- * Take the victim to a hospital immediately
- * Avoid any kind of friction or pressure on the wound
- * Cover the wound with a moist sterile bandage (avoid a blanket or towel to cover the burns)
- * After extinguishing the fire, remove all burning clothes. Wrap the victim in a clean bedsheet