

Managing the fire hazard with paraffin based skin products on dressings and clothing

Information for healthcare staff

Skin products containing paraffin based products, for example White Soft Paraffin, White Soft Paraffin plus 50% Liquid Paraffin or Emulsifying ointment, in contact with dressings and clothing are easily ignited with a naked flame or a cigarette. It is important that Health Care Staff do the following to minimise the risk of fire when patients are dispensed, or treated with, large quantities (100g or more) of paraffin based products.

General Advice

- Patients should be given information that includes advice about the potential fire risks of smoking (or being near to people who are smoking), or exposure to any open flame or other potential cause of ignition during treatment. In hospital units initiating therapy, this should be given in both verbal and written form.
- Patients and their families should be provided with safety advice about regularly changing clothing or bedding impregnated with paraffin based products (preferably on a daily basis), as the paraffin soaks in to the fabrics and can potentially be a fire hazard. Chairs or seating may also have the potential to become contaminated.
- This information should be given on the first occasion that such treatment is prescribed, dispensed or administered by a healthcare professional and a record kept confirming that such advice has been given. A check should be made on subsequent occasions that the advice has been received previously and understood.
- Patients should be encouraged to give the information about their treatment and any advice they have received to their relatives.
- The smoking status of patients should be established before commencing treatment. Patients who do smoke should be offered practical help and advice and continued support to stop smoking.

For Hospital Inpatients

- Fire safety information should be displayed prominently in every ward area where patients may be treated with significant quantities of paraffin based products.
- If, against advice, a patient intends to go off the ward to smoke they should be informed of the risk and advised to wear a thick outer covering that has not been contaminated with paraffin based products.
- Relatives or carers should be informed if a patient does not comply with safety advice and instructions during treatment involving significant quantities of paraffin based products.

For further information, go to www.npsa.nhs.uk