

Briefing Note: Salt & Ice Challenge – Risks to Children and Young People

Background

- The “Salt and Ice Challenge” is an online trend where young people place salt on their skin and press ice on top for as long as possible.
- This creates a chemical reaction, rapidly lowering the temperature and causing cryogenic (cold) burns, similar to frostbite.
- Children and young people may underestimate the harm as the cold numbs the skin, masking pain until significant damage has occurred.

Risks

- Second- or third-degree burns, potential need for skin grafts, lasting scarring, nerve damage, and impact on wellbeing.
- Peer and online pressure amplify the likelihood of wider uptake.

Recent Cases

- ED teams in North East London have already treated children for significant burns linked to this challenge.
- Similar surges have been reported nationally and internationally in the past.

Immediate First Aid Advice

- Cool the affected area under lukewarm running water for at least 10 minutes.
- Do not apply ice, creams, or fluffy dressings.
- Cover with clean cling film or smooth plastic.
- Seek medical attention for deep, blistered, or extensive burns.

Recommended Actions for Schools, Parents and Carers

- Awareness: Alert staff, parents, and carers to the risks of the Salt & Ice Challenge.
- Education: Reinforce with children and young people that this is not a “harmless game” but can cause serious and lasting harm.
- Safeguarding: Be alert to children presenting with unexplained burn injuries and consider safeguarding risks.

Communication suggestions:

- Use assemblies, PSHE lessons, and parent newsletters to share simple prevention messages.

Key Messages for Young People

- “The Salt & Ice Challenge can leave permanent scars—don’t risk it.”
- “Cold burns damage tissue, even if you can’t feel it happening.”
- “Don’t hurt yourself for likes—there are safer ways to have fun online.”