



MAKES DISHWASHING POWDER DISASTERS A THING OF THE PAST!

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Danger lurks at home

Harrison survives to warn others

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HEALTH REPORTER

BRISBANE preschooler Harrison Clarke's injuries would not have been worse had he swallowed acid or inhaled fire.

Three years after he removed a child-resistant cap from a bottle of dishwashing powder and swallowed about a teaspoon full, Harrison is still being fed through a tube in his stomach.

The powder caused deep, penetrating burns to the inside of his mouth, tongue, tonsils and lips, permanently scarred his esophagus and almost cost him his life.

When he arrived by ambulance at the Mater Children's Hospital emergency department, he was vomiting blood and struggling for breath as the burns swelled his airways.

Doctors likened his internal injuries to those of patients caught in blazing buildings who inhale fire as they try to breathe.

"I have never been more frightened in my life," Harrison's mother, Lisa Clark, recalled. "I went into theatre on a gurney with him in my arms. I wouldn't let him go."

"The anesthetist was yelling 'get him now'. The doctors literally had to wrench him out of my arms and take him."

"A doctor later told my husband, Darryl: 'We were so close to losing him. It was a matter of seconds.'"



RECOVERY . . . Harrison Clarke, 4, who will bear his scars for the rest of his life, with his mother Lisa. Picture: Bruce Long

Mater emergency pediatrician Ruth Barker, who treated Harrison, said the dishwashing powder had literally cooked his tissue.

"It . . . coagulates the blood. It's actually far worse than acid burns," Dr Barker said.

"That experience is not one that will leave me very quickly. It was very scary."

Harrison's story will be told to the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine's annual scientific meeting on the Gold Coast tomorrow to raise

awareness that "child resistant" packaging does not necessarily mean child proof.

Queensland Poisons Information Centre takes about 40 calls a day relating to children under five years of age.

And the Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit, which collects data from hospitals covering a quarter of the population, has reported that between 1998 and 2004, more than 1800 children under five required emergency treatment for non-medicinal poisoning.

One in four had consumed household cleaners, including dishwashing detergent.

Dr Barker has called on manufacturers to develop better child-protective packaging and quality control.

She said parents should also reduce poisons in the home, keep them out of children's reach and make sure they put caps back on bottles properly.

"In many instances, the cap requires an additional twist for the child-resistant mechanism to be activated," Dr Barker said.

Harrison, who was also born with a cleft lip and palate, will start Prep in February. In many ways, he's very much a normal four-year-old boy.

"He runs around and pinches his sisters, sits on the cat and all of those things," said Ms Clark, who has four other children.

But his feeding difficulties will be ongoing. He has to drink out of a bottle with a teat, like a newborn, and can only swallow a few bites of food at a time — all the result of a teaspoon of dishwashing powder.

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