Background

‘Acid’ attacks have been increasing in some areas. The term ‘acid attack’ has been widely used in the media to describe the use of corrosive substances in assaults and robberies – often directed at the victim’s face.

Corrosive substances do include acids, such as sulphuric acid, but also alkaline, or caustic, chemicals such as sodium hydroxide (also called caustic soda). This kind of attack often causes chemical burns of the skin or eyes.

New First Aid guidance for the public

The severity of a chemical burn can be reduced if action is taken as soon as possible to remove the chemical and contaminated clothing from contact with the skin or eyes. However, without appropriate care, helping yourself or others may lead to further injuries to the victim or contact injuries to the person helping them.

To help ensure that victims and bystanders know the best course of action to take in the event of an attack, NHS England has today published a new page on NHS Choices – www.nhs.uk/acidburns

We are also working with the British Burns Association and the British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons (BAPRAS) to promote this graphic on social media and other channels.

This guidance has been developed by burns specialists and approved by the NHS, and sets out a clear and memorable set of actions – Report, Remove, Rinse – which, taken quickly but carefully, can help reduce the likelihood and severity of life-changing injuries.
How you can help

The more people who know what to do in the event of an acid attack, the better. You can help spread this information by sharing the infographic and a link to NHS Choices via your website and social media channels; example posts include.

Acid attacks can lead to lasting injuries. Acting quickly and carefully to Report, Remove and Rinse can help reduce the impact for victims. NHS England and leading clinicians have published first aid guidance and information about treatment – please share to ensure as many people as possible know what to do in the event of an attack www.nhs.uk/acidburns

How the NHS helps victims

The majority of victims of acid attacks suffer only minor burns. These can usually be treated by ambulance and local hospital A&E staff, and will heal well with good burn care, including regular dressing changes and checks to prevent infection.

For the minority of patients who suffer severe burns, in most cases they will be transferred to one of the small number of specialist burns centres. Most patients spend a number of days or weeks in these centres being treated and recovering.

These centres are staffed by burns specialists and plastic surgeons, and can draw on the expertise of a number of other health professionals including specialist occupational therapists, physiotherapists and mental health professionals who will oversee ongoing recovery. Specialist ophthalmology services and surgery may also be needed where a patient has suffered damage to their eyes.

Acid attacks and the NHS – in numbers

14 – victims treated in one of England’s 23 specialist burns centres in all of 2014.
20 – victims treated in specialist burns centres in the first six months of 2017.
22 – average number of days these victims need to spend in a specialist burns unit.
£34,500 – estimated cost of NHS care for victims needing specialist burns treatment, eye care, rehabilitation and mental health support.
408 – reported acid attacks in the 6 months to April 2017 according to the National Police Chiefs Council – all attacks require urgent medical attention.
21 – percentage of victims (where age was recorded) who are under 18.

More information

For more information please get in touch with the NHS England Stakeholder and Public Affairs team on england.externalcomms@nhs.net or 0113 8248638.
IN THE EVENT OF AN ACID ATTACK

REPORT
dial 999

REMOVE
contaminated clothing carefully

RINSE
immediately in running water
Acid Attacks Briefing Note

Acid Attacks Summary

London Context

The Metropolitan Police Service indicate that noxious or corrosive fluids (which includes, but not limited to acid) were used in 454 offences across London in 2016, which was an increase of 193 offences from 2015 (increase of 74%) and East London has seen the highest number of attacks.

National Legislation

The Poisons Act 1972 draws a distinction between;

- Regulated substances (products containing high concentrations of specified chemicals) which are restricted from sale to the general public and require the person wishing to purchase the product to obtain a licence to acquire, possess and use.
- Reportable substances which can be purchased without a licence, but where retailers are required to report suspicious transactions and significant loss and theft.

A list of regulated and reportable substances and levels can be found in the House of Commons ‘Acid attacks’ briefing paper (July 2017).

http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8041

Criminal Offences

- It is now a criminal offence to ‘acquire or import’ any regulated substance without a valid licence, supply a member of the public with a regulated substance if they do not hold a valid licence, possess or use any regulated substance without the correct licence - all with a maximum penalty of 2 years’ imprisonment and/or a fine.
- It is also a criminal offence to fail to report suspicious transactions or significant loss/theft - maximum penalty of 3 months’ imprisonment and/or a fine.
- There is no one offence type in England and Wales for carrying out an acid attack. People committing these offences would be liable for a more general criminal offences including wounding (GBH with intent), unlawful wounding/inflicting GBH, sending, throwing or using explosive or corrosive substance or noxious thing or being in possession of any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person or intended by the person having it for such use.
The Islington Picture

According to a search of police recorded crime data, there have been 9 recorded attacks in Islington between 1 January 2017 and 31 July 2017 where either “acid” or “noxious” was found in the MO field or a ‘noxious/corrosive liquid’ feature has been added to the crime report. In comparison, there was 1 offence recorded in 2016 and 1 in 2015. Of the 9 offences recorded in 2017:

- 2 offences were recorded as GBH
- 4 robbery offences where a noxious substance was sprayed at the victim
- 2 offences recorded as ABH where a noxious substance was sprayed at the victim in the street
- 1 common assault offence where a substance was sprayed at victim, but this didn’t make contact with the person

Few incidents confirm the chemical composition of the substance used, but there were 4 offences where suspected ammonia was used, 2 offences where a strong acid was used, 1 offence where suspected bleach was used and 2 offences where the substance was unknown.

Due to the low number of incidents in Islington, no geographical hot spots have been identified and appear to be isolated cases.

In context, the number of offences where noxious or corrosive substances have been used in Islington is low compared to other violent crime types (such as knife crime with injury), however, there has been an increase in offences in 2017 so far and with levels being higher in neighbouring boroughs, a joint partnership response should be considered. The Safer Islington Partnership response (along with a wider London response) is outlined below. This is not exhaustive and will continue to be developed.

Partnership Response

- In response to the recent increased threat of acid attacks across central London, tensions have risen so the MPS have implemented borough wide dispersal zones during certain days and times
- Officers carry water to be used on victims who have had noxious substances in contact with their body
- Community Safety and Trading Standards have produced a poster with advice and action for retailers
- Community Safety are monitoring offences where noxious substances have been used to monitor for trends
- Children’s Services are speaking with young people they are working with about the dangers of carrying or using noxious/ corrosive substances
- Share the information found on Stop Hate UK
The Home Office Action Plan has been issued which indicates the following:

- The CPS guidance to prosecutors will be reviewed to ensure it makes clear that acid and other corrosive substances can be classed as dangerous weapons and what is required to prove intent.
- The Poisons Act 1972 will be reviewed to assess whether it should cover more acids and harmful substances.
- The Home Office will work with police and Ministry of Justice to assess whether the powers available to the courts, including sentencing, are sufficient to deal with these serious offences.
- New guidance will be provided to police officers on preventing attacks, searching potential perpetrators for harmful substances and responding to victims at the scene.
- Further work with retailers will be undertaken to agree measures to restrict the sales of acids and other corrosive substances.
- Improved police recording and reporting of offences.
- Commissioning research to better understand the motivations for carrying out these attacks.
- Confirming the appropriate support is provided to victims.
- Ensuring that victim impact statements are completed in every case by the police so courts are made aware of the full impact of the offence (including Community Impact Statements).
Do you sell Corrosive Substances?

What is a corrosive substance?
Substances that can damage skin tissues when they come in contact with them. Examples include:

**Strong acids** like sulphuric, hydrochloric & nitric.
**Caustic substances** like sodium hydroxide, potassium hydroxide & calcium hydroxide.

You may sell these in household products like drain, oven cleaners and strong bleaches.

Guidelines for selling corrosive substances responsibly

- **No corrosive substances** in shop location where it can be stolen, such as shop entrance
- **Organise stock** to make sale of corrosive substances safe

If someone comes into your shop wanting to buy a corrosive substance think **WHO** and **WHY**

**Who?**
- **Is the person behaving in a suspicious manner?**
- **Are they over 18?** Use the Challenge 25 policy one would for age restricted products (i.e. ask for ID if the person looks under 25)

**Why?**
- **What do they want it for?**

Assess – who wants to buy it & why?

**Challenge 25** – only sell corrosive substances to those over 18 by asking for ID if they look under 25

**ID** – ask for a driving licence or passport to prove age

**Don’t sell** if it doesn’t feel right

If you want further good practice advice about selling corrosive substances responsibly, contact Trading Standards on **0207 527 3198**.

If you want to report suspicious behaviour by someone buying or attempting to buy corrosive substances, please contact the **ASB Reporting Line** on **020 7527 7272**.

If you are in fear of your personal safety or that of someone else, call **999**.

It’s your shop. It’s your decision. It’s your responsibility.

**Be a responsible trader. If in doubt, don’t sell.**