



## In this Issue

**Burn Awareness Month**  
May

**Hand Hygiene Day**  
5 May

**World Salt Awareness Day**  
12-16 May

**International Awareness Day for Chronic Immunological and Neurological Diseases**  
12 May



**Child Protection Week**  
29 May – 5 June

**NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION WEEK**

## Burn Awareness Month

May is Burn Awareness Month in South Africa – a time to raise awareness about preventing injuries, deaths and property loss caused by burns. As we head into the colder months, here are some important safety tips to help protect your home and loved ones from the risk of fire.

### 1. Faulty Wiring and Appliances

Faulty wiring and electrical appliances are among the leading causes of house fires. Always hire a qualified electrician to carry out any electrical work, ensuring it meets the required safety standards. Don't forget to request a Certificate of Compliance for any completed work – it's not just a formality; it's a safety essential.

### 2. Overloaded Circuits and Unattended Devices

- Avoid overloading wall sockets with multiple adapters or extension cords – this is a common fire hazard.
- Hair styling tools such as flat irons can get extremely hot. Always unplug them after use and place them on a heat-resistant surface.
- Never leave electrical appliances like ovens, heaters or fans running unattended. Even decorative lights, such as fairy lights, can overheat and should be switched off when not in use.
- Be cautious during load shedding. Turn off plugs and appliances so they don't switch back on automatically when the power returns. Candles and fireplaces should never be left unattended. Keep all flammable items, such as curtains, blankets and carpets, away from open flames.
- If you have a fireplace at home, ensure the chimney flue is cleaned regularly for proper ventilation and to reduce fire risk. Use a fire screen to stop sparks or embers from escaping and never leave the fire burning unattended.

### 3. Gas Safety Around the Home

Gas-powered appliances – such as heaters, fireplaces and stoves – are increasingly common, but they do require special safety considerations, particularly when it comes to storage.

### According to SANS regulations:

- **In flats, townhouses or cluster homes:**
  - o Gas bottles **up to 9kg** may be stored indoors.
  - o Bottles **larger than 9kg** must be stored outside.
- **In freestanding homes:**
  - o Gas bottles **up to 19kg** may be stored **indoors**.
  - o Bottles **over 19kg** must be stored **outside**.

If you store a backup bottle in the garage, remember: if your garage is attached to your home, it counts as indoor storage. Because gas is a highly flammable substance, these regulations are designed to keep you safe and limit the amount of "fuel" available in case of a fire. Your home insurance policy may also have conditions related to gas storage – it's important to review your policy and ensure compliance to avoid future claims being affected.

### Be Prepared: Plan for Fire Safety

- Install and maintain smoke alarms in your home.
- Create an escape plan and ensure everyone in the household knows at least **two exit routes** from each room.
- If your home has burglar bars, make sure at least one window in each room has a **quick-release mechanism** for emergency escape.

### Additional home safety tips:

- Set your **geyser temperature** to **55°C** to reduce the risk of burns.
- When cooking with oil, always keep a **lid nearby** to smother flames in case of a fire. A **wet cloth** or **baking powder** can also be used to put out small oil fires.
- **Never** throw water on burning oil – it can cause the fire to spread or even explode.
- Keep a **fire extinguisher** and **fire blanket** in your kitchen for emergencies.

**In the event of a fire, call 10177 or 112 from your cell phone for emergency assistance.**



## Hand Hygiene Day 2025

### Clean Hands, Save Lives

5 May marks World Hand Hygiene Day—a vital reminder that something as simple as clean hands can have a powerful impact. Good hand hygiene remains one of the most effective ways to prevent infections and reduce the spread of disease.

Most of the germs that make us sick are transferred through direct or indirect contact with contaminated hands or surfaces. In fact, our hands carry on average 3 200 different germs belonging to more than 150 species – of which some can be harmful and cause infection.

This year's theme reinforces a shared responsibility: **“Clean care is in your hands.”** Improved handwashing technique can reduce transmissions of germs and bacteria - regular and proper handwashing with soap or alcohol-based hand rub is a small action that leads to big health outcomes.

The Centre for Disease Control (CDC) provides some solid guidance on hand washing techniques, and why they are important:

**Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.**

**Why?** Lathering and scrubbing hands creates friction, which helps lift dirt, grease, and microbes from skin. Microbes are present on all surfaces of the hand, often in particularly high concentration under the nails, so the entire hand should be scrubbed.

**Scrubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds removes more germs from hands than washing for shorter periods**

**Why?** Determining the optimal length of time for handwashing is difficult because few studies about the health impacts of altering handwashing times have been done. The optimal length of time

for handwashing is also likely to depend on many factors, including the type and amount of soil on the hands and the setting of the person washing hands. Evidence suggests that washing hands for about 15-30 seconds removes more germs from hands than washing for shorter periods. Accordingly, many countries and global organizations have adopted recommendations to wash hands for about 20 seconds (some recommend an additional 20-30 seconds for drying):

**Rinsing your hands well under clean, running water helps remove soap**

**Why?** Soap and friction help lift dirt, grease, and microbes—including disease-causing germs—from skin so they can then be rinsed off of hands. Rinsing the soap away also minimizes skin irritation. Because hands could become re-contaminated if rinsed in a basin of standing water that has been contaminated through previous use, clean running water should be used.

**Your hands should be as dry as possible after handwashing**

**Why?** Germs can be transferred more easily to and from wet hands; therefore, hands should be dried after washing. Studies suggest that using a clean towel or air-drying hands are best.

Let's continue to raise awareness, improve practices and make hand hygiene a daily habit.

**Clean hands are caring hands.**

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# World Salt Awareness Week

12 – 18 May 2025

Salt is a common ingredient in many of the foods we eat daily, but it's easy to overlook its potential health risks. While it adds flavour, consuming too much salt can contribute to serious health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease and strokes. The good news is that small changes in your diet can significantly improve your health.

## Why Should You Care About Salt?

Many processed foods—such as ready meals, snacks and even bread—contain high levels of salt. Over time, excessive salt consumption can lead to long-term health issues.

Learning about salt and how to manage your intake is an essential step toward a healthier lifestyle. By making conscious choices, you can lower your risk of developing chronic health conditions as you age.

## Healthy Cooking: A Low-Salt Approach

Cooking at home allows you to control the amount of salt in your meals. Learning to prepare healthy, low-salt dishes can be a fun and rewarding experience. Explore simple recipes that use herbs and spices to add flavour without relying on added salt.

## Decoding Food Labels

Many packaged foods contain hidden salt, so it's important to read nutrition labels. Look for foods that list lower amounts of salt per serving. It's easy to underestimate how much salt is in everyday meals. A good exercise is to visualise 6 grams of salt—the recommended maximum daily intake—by measuring it out with a spoon. See how much salt is in typical meals you eat and use this as a benchmark for reducing intake.

Tracking your salt consumption over a week can provide valuable insight into your eating habits. Record the salt content of your meals and snacks and calculate your total daily intake. Once you have this data, identify which foods contribute the most salt to your diet and make small adjustments to reduce them. This practice can help you make more informed choices when shopping for food items.

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# International Awareness Day for Chronic Immunological and Neurological Diseases

12 May 2025

Since 1992, May 12th has been designated as the International Awareness Day for Chronic Immunological and Neurological Diseases (CIND). This day brings global attention to a group of complex and often misunderstood illnesses, including Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME), Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), Fibromyalgia (FM) and Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS).

The date was chosen in honour of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, who was believed to have suffered from ME/CFS for the latter part of her life. Despite her illness, she continued to have a profound influence on health care.

- **Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)**  
ME/CFS is a debilitating, multi-system disease characterised by profound fatigue, post-exertional malaise (PEM), cognitive impairments and unrefreshing sleep. Patients often experience a significant reduction in their ability to carry out normal daily activities. Despite being recognised by health organisations, ME/CFS remains widely misunderstood and under-researched, contributing to long delays in diagnosis and appropriate care.
- **Fibromyalgia (FM)**  
Fibromyalgia is a chronic disorder defined by widespread musculoskeletal pain, accompanied by fatigue, sleep disturbances, memory issues and mood changes. The cause is not fully understood, but it's believed to involve the way the brain processes pain signals. FM can affect anyone but is more common in women. There is currently no cure, but symptoms can be managed through a combination of medication, lifestyle adjustments and support.
- **Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)**  
MCS is a chronic condition in which individuals experience adverse health effects from exposure to low levels of common chemicals such as perfumes, cleaning agents, pesticides and smoke. Symptoms can include headaches, breathing difficulties, fatigue and cognitive issues. The condition remains controversial in some medical circles due to the lack of consistent diagnostic criteria, but for those affected, the impact on quality of life can be severe.

Raising awareness about CIND illnesses is vital for improving research funding, public understanding and medical education. These conditions are often invisible, but can be severely disabling, leaving many patients isolated and without adequate support. 12 May is a reminder of the need for recognition, compassion and action in supporting individuals living with these life-altering diseases.

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## Child Protection Week

29 May - 5 June 2025

### Breaking the Silence: Why We Must Talk to Children About Their Rights and Protection

Every year, National Child Protection Week in South Africa serves as a crucial reminder of our shared responsibility to safeguard the rights and well-being of children. Established in 1997, it shines a light on the importance of protecting children from abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. It is led by the Department of Social Development in partnership with other government sectors and civil society organisations dedicated to child welfare.

At the heart of this initiative is a call to action for parents, educators, caregivers and communities to engage openly and honestly with children about their rights, and to speak out when those rights are violated.

Understanding these rights starts with knowing what they are. The Children's Act (Act No. 38 of 2005) and the South African Constitution lay a strong foundation for child protection. They affirm that every child is entitled to:

- A name and nationality
- Family care or suitable alternative care
- Basic needs like nutrition, shelter, healthcare, and social services
- Protection from neglect, maltreatment, and abuse
- Freedom from exploitative labour or inappropriate work
- Safety from involvement in armed conflict

But knowing their rights isn't enough. Children must be empowered to speak up, ask questions and know how to seek help. That starts with open, age-appropriate conversations—at home, at school and in communities.

Thankfully, there are excellent educational resources available to support these conversations:

- **Intermediate and Senior Phase learners** can explore the My Rights And Responsibilities From The South African Constitution PowerPoint to understand their rights and reflect on why they matter.
- **Older learners** can benefit from the Domestic Abuse Lesson Pack, which provides guidance on navigating sensitive topics and encourages meaningful discussions.
- **Younger children** can be taught about safety using the Safe And Unsafe Situations And Places PowerPoint, helping them recognise danger and how to respond.

Talking to children about their rights—and the realities they may face—is not easy, but it is essential. Silence allows harm to continue unchecked. By breaking that silence, we empower children to protect themselves and others, and we build a safer, more just society for all.

**Let's speak up. Let's educate. Let's protect.**

## References

World Salt Awareness Day - <https://www.actiononsalt.org.uk/>

International Awareness Day for Chronic Immunological and Neurological Diseases - <https://may12th.org/>

Child Protection Week - <https://www.twinkl.co.za/event/child-protection-week-south-africa-2025>

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