

PRESS RELEASE

British plastic and reconstructive surgeons urge caution as over one third of households consider home fireworks displays due to Covid restrictions

As public fireworks displays are expected to be postponed this year due to Covid-19, plastic, hand and burns surgeons are urging the public not to set off their own fireworks to reduce the risk of serious injury.

Polling by BAPRAS has found that over one third (37%) of households are considering holding fireworks at their own homes this year due to Covid-19 restrictions.¹

At a time when the NHS is expecting to be reaching capacity due to Covid-19, plastic, hand and burns surgeons are urging the public not to set off their own fireworks to reduce the risk of serious injuries, typically to the face and hands, which can require extensive reconstructive surgery and have a significant impact on function and form.

In recent years there has been a dramatic decline in the number of injuries caused by fireworks. In the year 2018-19 1,936 people visited A&E due to fireworks injuries. In the same period 2019-20, only 55 A&E visits were made due to fireworks injuries. (NHS Digital. Hospital Accident and Emergency Activity, 2018-19, 2019-20).²

However, surgeons fear that this could rise dramatically this year due to the expected suspension of public fireworks displays, leaving individuals and families to take administering fireworks in to their own hands.

Mark Henley, Consultant Plastic Surgeon and President of BAPRAS commented:

"Every November, plastic surgeons across the UK witness serious injuries caused by fireworks, with many patients requiring multiple rounds of complex reconstructive surgery. With the NHS stretched to capacity due to COVID-19 and a huge backlog for surgical procedures, we simply cannot afford for an increase in preventable injuries and urge people to think twice before purchasing fireworks for personal use."

For the last two years, BAPRAS has spearheaded a campaign to raise awareness of firework misuse as a cause of avoidable reconstructive surgery. Based on the experiences of plastic surgeons who have treated these unnecessary injuries, BAPRAS continues to recommend that graphic warning labels similar to those on cigarette boxes should be introduced on firework packaging. This was a change that almost 70% of parents polled said they would support, but which the Government has not yet implemented.

Additional quotes:

Alastair Brown, Consultant Plastic Surgeon at the Ulster Hospital, Belfast commented:

"As a Plastic Surgeon who manages trauma including injuries caused by fireworks and has experience of just how dangerous they can be if misused, I have seen first-hand some devastating and life-changing consequences. I fully appreciate the entertaining aspect of fireworks when handled correctly, but they pose a significant risk even in the safest of hands. It is always a tragedy to see the effects of these

¹ An online survey was conducted between Wednesday 21st October and Thursday 22nd October by Portland Communications. Sample: 1,215 UK adults (aged 21+) were interviewed online. 37% of respondents are considering or planning holding fireworks this year.

² NHS Digital. Hospital Accident and Emergency Activity, 2018-19 and 2019-20.

preventable injuries. Patients may require multiple surgeries and there can be a profound life-long impact on function, appearance and psychological wellbeing.

This year, more than ever, I am urging people to be most considerate to the circumstances and the pressures within the NHS. If organised displays have been cancelled in your area, please think twice before resorting to private displays – the potential risk is just too high and unnecessary at this time”.

David Warwick, President of the British Society for Surgery of the Hand (BSSH), added:

“Firework-related injuries have become an all-too-familiar sight for hand surgeons, the repercussions of which can be devastating with some even resulting in amputation. It is vital to remember that these injuries are preventable, particularly during a time where NHS efforts are already under increasing strain. We therefore strongly advise anyone considering holding their own displays at home this year to postpone their celebrations.”

Professor Kayvan Shokrollahi, Deputy Chair of the British Burn Association commented:

“We wish to highlight that the pandemic presents a potential double-whammy: an increase in use of garden fireworks due to a lack of organised firework displays and a health service under unprecedented strain. My advice to the general public is to be extra cautious this year for bonfire night, Diwali and New Year celebrations.

Most injuries are caused by incorrect firework use, handling of fireworks, and use of petrol or other accelerants to light bonfires. Along with burns, explosive eye and hand injuries are especially common. Furthermore, alcohol consumption and fireworks can be a lethal combination, so please act responsibly!”

- ENDS -

For further information, interview requests or campaign graphics, please contact Harriet Evans on 020 7554 1873 or BAPRAS@portland-communications.com

About the British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons (BAPRAS):

The British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons is the voice of plastic surgery in the UK, advancing education in all aspects of the specialty and promoting understanding of contemporary practice. BAPRAS speaks for the majority of reconstructive and aesthetic plastic surgeons providing services to patients in the UK today. For more information visit www.bapras.org.uk or @BAPRASvoice on Twitter.

About the British Society for Surgery of the Hand (BSSH):

The British Society for Surgery of the Hand has over 900 members who are dedicated to treating hand problems in order to preserve or restore pain free function. The Society is dedicated to improving the hand care available for patients. For more information see www.bssh.ac.uk or @bsshhand on Twitter.

About the British Burn Association (BBA):

The British Burn Association is the professional, multidisciplinary body representing burn care in Great Britain and Ireland, promoting study into burn prevention, burn care and burn injury outcome for the benefit of the public. Further information is available at <https://www.britishburnassociation.org> or @BritishBurn on Twitter.