



Treatment for chemicals in the eye

Good news! Just over a year ago we published a note about how to deal with chemicals in the eye. Briefly, we suggested holding open the eyelids and rinsing the eye under running water for at least ten minutes and, in the case of alkalis, for hours. We have now heard of several recent cases where hospital staff have congratulated science teachers and technicians for following this recommendation, thus ensuring that the eye was undamaged. Note that in cold weather running cold water can by itself be quite painful!

Now the bad news. It seems that ambulance staff and sometimes staff in casualty departments may not be aware of the need to irrigate the eye continuously in the case of alkali injuries. Indeed, they may share the general view of the public that acids are dangerous-but what are alkalis? Science staff should be prepared to tell paramedics that continuous irrigation is necessary. If the school has one or more trained first-aiders, it would be worth checking that they are also aware of this advice, especially when they are not members of the science department.