

Keeping Playgrounds Safe

WHAT STEPS ARE YOU TAKING TO PREVENT FALLS AND REDUCE INJURIES?

Playgrounds provide space for children to explore their physical capabilities and develop social skills. Unfortunately, they can also be the scene of serious accidents. Most injuries occur when a child falls from the equipment onto the ground.

Although you can't prevent every playground mishap, you can reduce the risk of serious falls and accidents through proper playground design, equipment maintenance, and child supervision.

OUTDOOR PLAYGROUNDS

Design

- **USE ONLY PROFESSIONALLY DESIGNED EQUIPMENT.** Don't use anything that is not designed for playground use, and don't design your own equipment.
- **REMOVE EQUIPMENT FROM HARD SURFACES**, such as asphalt, concrete, grass, or packed dirt.
- **COVER AREAS UNDER EQUIPMENT UNIFORMLY** with at least 12 inches of shock-absorbing surface material, such as wood chips, mulch, pea gravel, sand, or safety-tested rubber mats. Consult a playground equipment dealer for options.
- **EXTEND PROTECTIVE SURFACING** at least six feet in all directions from play equipment. For swings, measure the height of the bar suspending the swings, then double that measurement to determine how far protective surfacing should extend in front and back of the swings.
- **PROTECT ELEVATED PLAY AREAS**, like platforms and ramps, with continuous guardrails—20 inches above ground for preschoolers, 30 inches for school-age children.
- **ENSURE THE SPACE BETWEEN HANDRAILS AND LADDER RUNGS** measures less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches to prevent head entrapment.
- **ANCHOR EQUIPMENT FIRMLY** in the ground.
- **ENSURE SWINGS ARE SPACED** at least 2 feet apart and 30 inches from the side poles to prevent crashes.
- **ALLOW ADEQUATE SPACING BETWEEN EQUIPMENT** so children can move freely. This will reduce the likelihood of a child being hit by moving equipment or being struck by another child exiting a slide or monkey bars. At least nine feet is recommended.

- **SEPARATE PLAYGROUNDS FROM ROADWAYS** with a fence, wall, or other secure barrier.

Equipment Maintenance

- **REMOVE EQUIPMENT** associated with frequent injuries.
- **REPLACE HEAVY SWING SEATS** with lightweight seats of canvas or plastic. A free-swinging, empty, heavy swing can cause serious injury if it hits a child's head.
- **CLEAN PLAYGROUNDS REGULARLY**, being alert for hazards such as broken glass or sharp metal objects.
- **REGULARLY INSPECT EQUIPMENT** for worn or missing parts, loose bolts, sharp edges or points, damaged "s" hooks, and exposed components that could trip, pinch, or crush someone.
- **LUBRICATE MOVING PARTS** properly and repair or replace splintered or cracked wood.
- **MAINTAIN PROTECTIVE SURFACING** to a depth of 12 inches if you use loose material, such as sand, gravel, or mulch.

INDOOR PLAYGROUNDS

Design

- **USE ONLY PROFESSIONALLY DESIGNED EQUIPMENT.** Don't design your own climbing walls, slides, or other structures.
- **INSTALL SAFETY SURFACING.** Provide appropriate mats or rubberized flooring beneath play structures.

Equipment Maintenance

- **CHECK SAFETY NETTING FOR TEARS OR FRAYS.** Torn netting could allow a child to climb onto the outer portions of the equipment and fall onto a hard surface.
- **CHECK CARGO WEBBING OR ROPE EQUIPMENT FOR TEARS OR FRAYS.** Torn rope equipment or loose sewing connections in the cargo webbing may be an entrapment or tripping hazard.
- **INSPECT FLOOR SURFACE FOR TEARS.** Torn surfacing could lead to trips or ankle sprains. If mats are used outside the play structure, they should be placed tightly together to prevent trips or sprains.

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ALL PLAYGROUNDS

Child Supervision

- **TEACH ALL CHILDREN TO USE EQUIPMENT CORRECTLY** and to watch for people in front of and behind them. Children younger than 5 should be accompanied by an adult while using playground equipment.
- **SEPARATE PRESCHOOLERS FROM OLDER CHILDREN.** Children ages 2 to 5 are at a disadvantage in collisions with older children. Preschoolers should play in a different area than older children and be accompanied by an adult.
- **KEEP AN EYE ON CHILDREN'S CLOTHING.** Loose ties, hooded sweatshirts, jewelry and shoelaces can get caught on equipment and cause serious injury.
- **MAKE SURE PLAY REMAINS UNDER CONTROL.** Don't let children jump over railings, run near swings, climb up slides, or linger at the bottom of slides.
- **COMPLY WITH STATE REGULATIONS** regarding proper adult-to-child ratios for supervision. The presence of two adults at all times is strongly recommended.
- **PLAN HOW YOU WILL RESPOND TO AN INJURY.** Make sure your plan allows for continued supervision while others are assisting the injured child.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PLAYGROUND SAFETY, CONTACT:

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

4330 East West Highway
Bethesda, MD 20814
1-800-638-2772
www.cpsc.gov

National Program for Playground Safety

School of HPELS, WRC 205
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0618
1-800-554-PLAY
www.uni.edu/playground

National Safety Council

1121 Spring Lake Drive
Itasca, IL 60143-3201
(630) 285-1121
www.nsc.org

Consumer Federation of America

1424 16th St. NW, Suite 604
Washington, DC 20036
202-387-6121
www.consumerfed.org