# Keep Kids Safe

A Parent's Guide to Playground Safety



Always stay with your young child to help prevent and reduce injuries.



Partners in Children's Safety







### A SAFE Playground is a Fun Playground!

Whether you are in a public playground or in your own backyard, it's important to remember to always be S.A.F.E.

S. A. F. E. stands for:

Supervision

Age Appropriate

Fall Surfacing

Equipment

Playgrounds can be a wonderful place for children to be creative, social and physical. Unfortunately, children are injured every year on both public and home playgrounds.

This booklet provides information to help create a safer playspace for your child at home. Many of the recommendations are based on the Canadian Standards Association Standard, "Children's Playspaces and Equipment". This standard was developed for public playgrounds, but gives information that will also be useful when setting up your own home playspace.

### A Quick Look at Injuries...

- In Canada each year, it is estimated that more than 28 500 children are treated for playground-related injuries.
- From 1998-2001, more than 950 children were seen in the Emergency Department of the IWK Health Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, due to playground-related injuries.
- Most of these injuries occured in the 5-9 year old age group, with boys being injured more often than girls.
- Falls are the number one cause of playground injuries.

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## Supervision



- Actively supervising children when they are playing is the best way to prevent playground injuries.
- Active supervision is being alert and watching at a close enough distance to take action if needed.
- Pay attention to the play environment including the ground covering, the play equipment, as well as the activities of the children.

It only takes a minute... While mom was sitting on the park bench reading a magazine, she didn't see her children find the needle buried in the sand.



# Age Appropriate

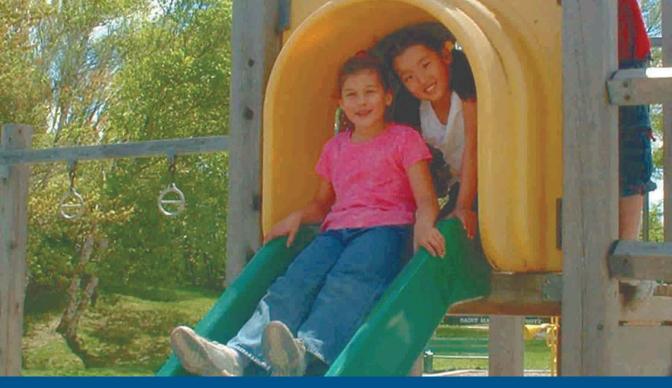


CSA requires an age-appropriate label on equipment in public playgrounds. Check for this label on equipment before you allow your child to play.

Children playing on equipment that is too high or large for them raises the chance that they will be injured. It is generally recommended that:

- Children under 5 years of age should play on equipment under 1.5 m (5 ft) high.
- If your child cannot reach the equipment by themselves, it is probably not appropriate for their size.

It only takes a minute... Dad was only trying to help when he lifted three year old Heather up so she could try the big monkey bars. Unfortunately, Heather was too small and ended up falling 1.5 m (5 ft) and breaking her arm.



# Fall Surfacing



Safety Tip

Falls are the number one cause of playground-related injuries. Having proper surfacing under and around your play equipment can affect how badly your child is injured.

Recommended Ground Covering:

Soft Sand Wood Chips Pea Gravel Rubber Material Not Recommended Ground Covering:

Grass
Sharp Rocks
Hard-Packed Dirt
Pavement

- The higher the equipment is from the ground, the deeper the surfacing should be.
- Check frequently for sharp/dangerous objects that may become hidden in the surfacing.
- Grass is not considered a safe surface to have underneath play equipment because it doesn't cushion falls as well as other materials.

There are several safe surfacing options for your play space. These include soft sand, wood chips, pea gravel and rubber material. What you choose depends on cost, availability, and personal preference. Remember that certain weather conditions can greatly reduce the effectiveness of any surfacing.

#### Pea Gravel



#### Advantages

- drains well
- durable
- does not blow around
- effective in rain

#### Disdvantages

- · can be put in mouth and ears
- cannot be used with wheelchairs
- can be scattered or thrown
- freezes and compacts

#### **Wood Chips**



#### Advantages

- fairly durable
- drains well
- children tend not to play with the material

#### Disdvantages

- can cause splinters
- freezes and compacts
- can scatter

Soft Sand



#### Advantages

- drains well
- durable
- cost effective

#### Disdvantages

- · can get in mouth and ears
- cannot be used with wheelchairs
- can be thrown or scattered
- pets are attracted to the sand

#### **Rubber Material**



#### Advantages

- durable
- drains well
- can be used with wheelchairs
- easy to clean

#### Disdvantages

- can become hard over a long time
- can be flammable in high heat
- · more expensive



## Equipment

It only takes a minute...

Hillary and Tyler were playing on the backyard play structure. Hillary ran directly in front of Tyler, on the swing, in order to get to the sandbox and was struck in the head by Tyler's foot.

# Spacing... Around the Play Equipment

Try and leave as much space as possible around your play equipment. The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) recommends at least 1.8 m (6 ft) around most pieces of equipment. Extra space is needed at the bottom of slides and in front of and behind swings. This space is needed to protect children using the equipment as well as anyone who may be in the area of the equipment.

# Spacing... Within the Play Equipment

It is very important to make sure your child's head cannot be trapped in the spaces of the equipment itself. All spaces should be smaller than 9 cm (3.5 in) or larger than 23 cm (9 in).

### Other Play Equipment

### **Pools**

- ALWAYS have an adult watching children in and around the pool.
- Check with your municipality about the rules for fencing in backyard pools. A fence will help keep children safe.
- Store pool chemicals out of the reach and sight of children.
- Take your children to swimming and water safety lessons.

### Sandboxes

- The sandbox should be located off to the side of any playground equipment.
- The sand should pack together easily for moulding. Brick sand or seaside sand is great for this. Blow sand should not be used.
- A sand depth of 2 cm (0.79 in) is recommended as a minimum. A good sand depth is 4.5 cm (1.77 in).

### **Trampolines**

- Children under 6 years of age should never use trampolines.
- Consider putting netting around the outside of the trampoline to create walls.
- Allow only one person on the trampoline at a time.

# Rules for Safe Play

- Never attach things like clotheslines, skipping ropes or pet leashes to play equipment. Children can get tangled in them and choke.
- · Never jump off a swing while it is still moving.
- Always use the stairs to climb up a slide.
- Only one person on the slide at a time.
- NEVER wear a helmet while playing on equipment. It could cause your child's head to
  get caught in a space they would normally fit through and/or the strap could get caught
  and choke your child.

## Playground Checklist

To make sure your playground is safe for children to play on each time, use the provided checklist. Things can change quickly from one use to the next.



It is important to contact the owner of the playground to report unsafe conditions. This may be the school, the municipality or the town office.

Recommended surfacing such as pea gravel, wood chips, rubber or soft sand is used and kept in good condition around the play equipment.
Surfacing covers at least $1.8\ m$ (6 ft) in all directions from the play equipment.
Spaces are either less than 9 cm (3.5 in) or greater than 23 cm (9 in). Look for spaces that could trap a child's head or body.
Platforms have ramps and guardrails to prevent falls.
Watch for sharp points or edges on equipment that can catch on children's clothing.
Swing seats are made of soft material such as rubber or canvas.
Play equipment is firmly anchored to the ground.
Remove water near the play equipment such as puddles, pails of water or wading pools. Children can drown in as little as $5\ \text{cm}$ (2 in) of water.
Watch for tripping hazards like exposed concrete or tree stumps around play equipment.
Take off anything that could choke your child on the

play equipment such as scarves, drawstrings and helmets.

#### I mages:

Cover, table of contents, page 1: Source: Healthy Images CD-Rom Vol. 1, Health Canada, (1997)©, Healthy Images, Children-Youth

Special thanks to everyone that contributed personal photos for the creation of this playground safety guide.

### Looking for more information?

Canadian Parks and Recreation Association www.cpra.ca

Canadian Standards Association www.csa.ca

National Program for Playground Safety (USA site) www.uni.edu/playground/home.htm

#### For more information, contact:

Child Safety Link IWK Health Centre 5850/5980 University Avenue PO Box 9700, Halifax NS B3K 6R8

Call (902) 470-6496 or 1-866-288-1388 childsafetylink@iwk.nshealth.ca www.childsafetylink.ca

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