

Playground safety

Information for parents and caregivers

Playgrounds can be a lot of fun and provide a wonderful opportunity for children to play; socialise; develop and test their physical skills; play creatively and use their imagination; and get some exercise.

Playground injuries

Injuries are often thought of as a normal consequence of play. While minor injuries, like cuts, bruises and grazes will happen, some injuries are more serious. Falls are the number one cause of injury in children requiring admission to hospital.

The most serious playground injuries are caused when children fall from a height onto a hard surface such as compacted earth, bitumen, or concrete, which have no impact absorbing properties. Broken bones (a fracture), dislocation of joints, and/or head injuries are common injuries due to falls of this nature.

Monkey bars are the most common item of equipment that children fall from, though falls from slides, swings, trampolines and climbing frames are also common.

The chance of an injury is greater for preschool and primary school-aged children, who are still developing body strength and judgement skills. Toddlers also fall; mainly because they are top-heavy (their head is larger in proportion to their body), and will often land on their face or head.

Factors that contribute to playground injuries

1. Unsafe play equipment and lack of under-surfacing.
2. Lack of adult supervision.
3. Children not using equipment properly or the equipment not suited to their age or stage of development.

Tips for safer home play equipment

- Home play equipment should be strong, sturdy and securely anchored.
- Ensure the equipment is well maintained and in good working order with no splits, cracks or rust.
- Ensure equipment is not too high – reduce the fall height of equipment to reduce the risk of injury from falls.
- Ensure there is a large clear space around play equipment that has no hard objects onto which a child might fall.
- Surfaces underneath equipment should be soft enough to cushion falls. A rule of thumb for the backyard is to ask yourself if you would be comfortable dropping to your knees from a standing position onto the surface.
- Check for spaces that could trap a child's head or neck, particularly if they were to slip through feet first.
- Watch for sharp edges that could cut; also splinters and protruding parts that could pierce the skin, or tangle children's clothing.
- Regularly inspect play equipment, especially for insect/animal infestation.
- Always supervise young children playing in the backyard.

Trampolines

Trampolines are associated with a disproportionate amount of injuries to children. The most common ways a child is injured on a trampoline include falling off onto a hard surface below, getting caught in springs, collisions when there is more than one jumper, and when the trampoline is used in the wrong way e.g. children running/lying underneath when in use. The majority of trampoline injuries occur in the backyard.

- Only buy a trampoline that complies with the safety Standard AS 4989:2006, which includes safety pads to cover the frame and springs and has a safety net installed around the sides.
- Locate it over a soft surface e.g. well-watered lawn and never concrete or asphalt.
- Ensure there is a large clear space around the trampoline that has no hard objects onto which a child could fall.
- Lay down the rules for trampoline use e.g. one at a time and teach children to jump in the middle of the mat and not to jump off.
- Regularly check the mat for wear and tear; that the springs are securely attached; the frame is sturdy and well anchored etc.
- Ensure adult supervision at all times.

Ways to prevent playground injuries

1. Safe play equipment

There is an Australian Standard for Playground Equipment. The Standard was first established in 1996 (AS 1924) and then revised in 2004. The Standard is AS 4685: 2004 and covers both fixed and mobile equipment, and indoor and outdoor play equipment. The Australian Standard specifies requirements for the safety, design, construction, installation, maintenance of playground equipment, and undersurfacing materials.

Although this Standard is not mandatory, compliance represents best practice, and may be referred to in any court action against facilities which provide playground equipment for children, for example, child care centres, schools, private organisations (hotels, family restaurants) and local councils.

Kidsafe SA has prepared a Playspace Resource Kit to assist in understanding the different aspects of the Standard. Copies of the Resource Kit can be purchased by contacting Kidsafe SA.

Kidsafe SA also provides a Playground Inspection Service, whereby they inspect playgrounds according to the relevant Australian Standards, provide a full written and photographic report, and ongoing support (on a fee-for-service basis).

Home playground equipment does not need to meet these Standards. However, please refer to the previous page for tips for safer home play equipment.

2. Adult supervision

Parents can help prevent playground injuries by ensuring that there is adult supervision when children are playing, and making sure the type of play and equipment being used is appropriate to a child's age and maturity level. If an injury does occur, an adult is there to assist the child and to administer first aid.

3. Teach children some playground rules

Parents can teach children, from a young age, some important rules when playing. For example:

- No pushing or roughhousing while on the play equipment.
- Use the equipment the proper way. For example, slide with their feet first when playing on a slippery dip. Sit on swings, don't stand.
- Choose play equipment that is the right size for their age and stage of development. A good rule to follow: if a child is too small to reach and use equipment by him/herself, then that equipment is not designed for a child of that age.
- Jump with caution – look out for other children and objects, and land on both feet with knees slightly bent. Don't play when equipment is wet or hot.
- Don't wear hats or clothing with dangling cords or strings that can get caught on equipment and accidentally strangle them.
- Wear sunscreen.

For more information, contact:

Kidsafe SA Inc.
Women's and Children's Hospital
72 King William Rd,
North Adelaide SA 5006
Phone: (08) 8161 6318
Email: sa@kidsafe.org.au
Website: www.kidsafesa.com.au

Kidsafe © 2010