

Child safety - playground equipment

Play is an important part of a child's development. Playing outside in the fresh air can be fun and adventurous, particularly when there are playmates. Yet many Australian children are less active than they need to be.

The backyard or local playground provides lots of scope to run, climb, swing, explore and play imaginary games. Some parents may limit their child's playtime activities because they are concerned about injury. With careful planning, however, play environments can be challenging **and** safe for children.

Playground benefits

Being outdoors encourages all types of free play and helps children understand their environment. Playgrounds provide children with a range of experiences and opportunities including:

- Being physically active
- Being challenged and taking risks
- Socialising with friends
- Learning to cooperate
- Using their imagination
- Playing independently.

A well-designed playground will stimulate the child's imagination and tempt them to explore new dimensions to play.

Playground injuries can be avoided

Almost three-quarters (70%) of injuries in playgrounds are a result of falls. The most common serious injury from playgrounds is fractures. Some other common injuries include spinal injuries and head injuries.

The higher the drop, the more likely it is that the injury will be severe, particularly if the ground beneath the equipment is hard, rather than loosely filled with mulch or sand.

With careful planning, play environments can be made safe for children and unnecessary injuries can be avoided.

Tips for protecting your child's safety

To protect children, it is important to:

- Plan ahead for active time and aim to get children outdoors as often as possible within safe environments.
- Limit their play to equipment appropriate for their age and abilities.
- Supervise them at all times.
- Be a role model of active but sensible play and teach them how to use the equipment safely and sensibly.
- Make sure that the children drink enough water. Provide water to enable children to re-hydrate during and after physical activity and play.
- Do not allow a sick or injured child to play.
- Place less emphasis on competing and more on fun and participation.
- Protect your child from the sun with appropriate clothes, a cap and sunscreen.

Playground equipment at home

Safety suggestions for your backyard playground include:

- Any raised platform should be made secure by a guard or handrail.

- Cover all hooks, nails or bolts.
- Rubber surfaces provide better grip than metal or wood.
- Check the equipment regularly for signs of wear and tear.
- Use mulch, river sand or other soft materials (such as rubberised surfacing) underneath the play equipment to offer a softer landing in case of falls.
- Consider less risky play equipment, such as a sandpit.

Safety on trampolines

Some of the common injuries incurred by children using trampolines include fractures, injuries to internal organs and spinal injuries. It is essential that children are supervised by an adult while jumping on a trampoline.

Safety guidelines include:

- Cover the springs with padded mats. When buying a trampoline, look for one that meets Australian Standard AS4989-2003, a voluntary standard that requires the frame to have padding.
- Trampolines are not suitable for children under six years of age. Consider the trampoline as sports equipment, not a toy.
- Make sure the trampoline is in good repair and replace worn parts promptly. If the trampoline is outside and exposed to sun and rain, check regularly for signs of rusting and other damage.
- Sink the trampoline into the ground for greater stability; this also provides a lower fall height.
- Drinking or eating while bouncing should not be allowed because of the possibility of inhaling food and choking.
- Bare feet provide better grip.
- Only one child at a time on the trampoline.
- Encourage and remind the child to jump in the centre, not near the sides.
- Teach the child to get on and off the trampoline slowly and safely.
- Clear the area around the trampoline of any obstacles, toys and debris.

Local council playgrounds

Equipment in a public playground generally caters for children of all ages. Your child might be at risk of injury from a piece of equipment designed for older children. Safety tips include:

- Make sure your child only uses equipment that is appropriate for their age, strength and coordination.
- Remind your child to be aware of other children playing, particularly near swings or other moving pieces of equipment.
- Contact your local council if the equipment needs repair or maintenance work.

First aid advice

Emergency medical treatment for young children isn't always the same as for adults, which is why all parents should ideally take a course in paediatric (child) first aid. The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre in Melbourne facilitates first aid courses for the public. The six-hour Paediatric Emergency Care course is particularly helpful for parents, grandparents, nannies, sports coaches and child care providers.

You can also contact the Safety Centre Telephone Advisory Line on (03) 9345 5085 for advice on a particular safety issue.

Never hesitate to call an ambulance if your child is injured. Throughout Australia, the emergency number to dial is triple zero (000).

Where to get help

- In an emergency, dial triple zero (000) to call an ambulance
- Your doctor
- Emergcare (for first aid course) Tel. (03) 9304 1622
- Your local council
- Safety Centre, Royal Children's Hospital Tel. (03) 9345 5085
- Sports medicine Australia – Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777
- Playgrounds and Recreation Association of Victoria

- Resource Centre for Child Health and Safety Tel. (03) 9345 6429
- Kids-‘Go for your life’ – for more information on physical activity and health eating

Things to remember

- Children using playground equipment are most often injured by falls.
- You can reduce the risk by always supervising your child, limiting their play to age-appropriate equipment and teaching them to use the equipment sensibly.
- Maintain a soft surface under and around all play equipment to a depth of 300mm.

Want to know more?

Go to More information for support groups, related links and references.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Royal Childrens Hospital - Safety Centre

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