
Playgrounds and child safety

Summary

- Children using playground equipment can experience many health, social and cognitive benefits.
 - Although children sometimes fall from playground equipment, you can reduce the risk of injury by keeping an eye on your children, encouraging the use of age-appropriate equipment and allowing them to explore creative but safe ways to move.
 - Make sure there is a suitable surface beneath and around all play equipment, that has been tested in accordance with Australian Standard AS 4422.
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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. With careful planning, play environments can be both challenging and safe for children. The backyard or local playground provides lots of scope to run, climb, swing, explore and play imaginary games.

To create safe play areas for children, make sure they are separate from driveways, roads and water hazards.

Keep young children within eyesight of an adult at all times while outdoors.

Playground benefits for children

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 a child's imagination and encourage them to explore new dimensions to play.

Playground injuries can be avoided

Most child injuries in playgrounds are the result of falls. Most playground injuries are minor, such as scratches or bruises. However, sometimes, playground injuries result in fractures. Other rare but serious injuries include spinal and head injuries.

Climbing can be fun but the high drops can increase the risk of injury. Given their own time and space, most children will safely and gradually increase the distance they can climb.

To help make landings safer, check to make sure there is suitable 'impact attenuating surfacing' beneath and around all play equipment. An impact attenuating surface is a softer surface that is safer in case of falls. This surface needs to have been tested to the Australian Standard for playground surfacing, AS 4422. It can include loose fill materials such as bark or sand, or solid materials such as wet pour rubber.

With well-thought-out planning, play environments can be made safe for children and injuries can be avoided.

Tips for protecting your child's safety

To encourage safe play:

- Plan ahead for active time and aim to get children outdoors as often as possible in safe environments.
- Ensure children use equipment that is appropriate for their age and abilities.
- Supervise young children at all times.
- Where possible, be a role model of active but sensible play and encourage them to use the equipment creatively, but safely.
- Make sure children drink enough fluids. Provide water to enable them to re-hydrate during and after play.
- Modify play for a sick or injured child if they are well enough to express an interest.
- Place less emphasis on competing and more on creativity, socialising, having fun and participation.
- Protect your child from the sun with appropriate clothes, a cap, sunglasses and sunscreen. When UV levels are low (usually from May to mid-August), sun protection is not recommended, unless you are spending extended periods of time outdoors, or near reflective surfaces, such as snow.
- Playground equipment at home

Safety suggestions for your backyard playground include:

- Ensure equipment is suitable for the age and abilities of your children.
- Set up equipment in a safe area that provides shade, is easily supervised, accessible and away from hazards including swimming pools, roads and driveways.
- Ensure play equipment is strong, sturdy and securely anchored.
- Make any raised platform secure with a guard or handrail.
- Cover all hooks, nails or bolts. Ensure play equipment doesn't have sharp edges, splinters or protruding parts that could pierce skin, or tangle in a child's hair or clothing.
- Use rubber surfaces – they provide better grip than metal or wood.
- Check the equipment regularly for signs of wear and tear.
- Use impact attenuating surfacing underneath play equipment to offer a softer landing in case of falls. Loose fill materials (such as sand and bark) should be installed and maintained to a minimum depth of 300 mm.
- Consider including natural playspace elements to provide unstructured spaces and activities for learning and spontaneous play, such as digging patches, boulders and sandpits.
- Remove any poisonous plants that may harm or cause illness in children.

Safety on trampolines

Trampolines can be amazing for children's balance, coordination and fitness. However, hundreds of Australian children are taken to hospital every year for trampoline-related injuries, such as cuts, sprains and fractures. To minimise the risk of injuries from trampolines, it is important that children are supervised by an adult while playing on a trampoline.

Safety guidelines include:

- When buying a trampoline, look for one that meets the voluntary Australian Standard AS 4989:2015.
- Never set-up or use the trampoline on concrete, as falling onto this hard surface is likely to cause major injuries. Surround the trampoline with impact absorbing material such as bark or mulch that has been tested to AS 4422.
- Supervise. Watch children at all times and take extra care with younger children as they are more prone to serious injury.
- Make sure the trampoline is in good order 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.
- Regularly check the mat and net don't have holes, springs are intact and securely attached at both ends, frames are not bent, and the leg braces are locked.
- Make sure the area around the trampoline is free from hazards like fences or garden furniture and there is an overhead clearance to avoid objects like trees and wires.
- A safety enclosure can help prevent falls, however it shouldn't be relied upon on its own to keep children safe. Even with an enclosure in place, children still need to play safely on the trampoline and be supervised by an

adult at all times.

- Always use safety padding on the frame. Cover the springs with padded mats.
- Be aware that large trampolines are not recommended for children under six years of age.
- Consider installing the trampoline in the ground to reduce fall heights and provide greater stability.
- Do not allow drinking or eating while bouncing because of the possibility of choking.
- Make sure children use the trampoline with bare feet for better grip.
- **Make sure there is 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

Public playgrounds generally have a range of equipment to cater for children of all ages. To help keep children safe:

- 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.
- Always supervise children.
- 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 Community Information team (formerly Safety Centre) in Melbourne facilitates first aid courses for the public. The six-hour **Paediatric First Aid course** is particularly helpful for parents, grandparents, nannies, sports coaches and childcare providers.

(You can also contact the Community Information telephone line on **(03) 9345 5085** for advice on a particular safety issue.)

Other organisations that offer first aid training in Victoria include:

- **St John Ambulance Australia (Victoria)**
- **Australian Red Cross**
- **Life Saving Victoria**.

You can also choose to search for a first aid training provider in your area.

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 **GP (doctor)**
- Local council
- **Community Information (formerly Safety Centre) telephone line**, The Royal Children's Hospital Tel. **(03) 9345 5085**
- **Kidsafe Victoria** Tel. **(03) 9036 2306**
- **Play Australia** Tel. **0419 363 666**

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Kidsafe Victoria

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