

**Capital Parent – Bear Facts Column
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Playground Safety

Kids love to play outside. It is an excellent form of recreation, exercise and fun. Playgrounds are a great place for creative, social and physical outdoor play. Unfortunately, playgrounds are also associated with many injuries to children.

How safe is your playground?

In 1998, the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) published CSA-Z614, Children's Play Spaces and Equipment. This standard was developed to reduce the risk of playground injuries in Canada. Check that the playground in your community meets the CSA standard. Copies of this standard and its revisions can be obtained from the Canadian Standards Association by phoning 1-800-463-6727 or online at www.csa.ca

To ensure a safe environment for play, check for the following:

- Beware of hazards that can injure your child, such as broken glass, garbage, sharp corners and rusted or protruding bolts.
- Spaces between stairs or railings can cause strangulation. These spaces are considered safe if they are larger than 22.5cm (9 inches) or smaller than 9cm (3.5 inches).
- An impact absorbing material should be placed under the play structure. Grass, dirt, and sand are not impact absorbing. Pea gravel, wood chips, rubber chips, or rubber mats all work well.
- Equipment less than 1.8m (6 feet) should have at least 15cm (6 inches) of cushioning.
- Equipment higher than 1.8m should have at 30cm (12 inches) of cushioning

The Stats:

- In Canada, thousands of children are seen each year in emergency rooms and doctors' offices for treatment of injuries that occurred on a playground. Children between the ages of 5 and 9 were hurt most often. Boys are more likely to be hurt than girls.
- Between 1998 and 2000 a total of 3,335 patients were treated at CHEO for playground related injuries.

- Almost half of the injuries were fractures, followed by superficial injuries including abrasions, lacerations and contusions.
- The most common body area fractured was the forearm, followed by the elbow and upper arm. The most common body area resulting in superficial injuries was the face. Thirteen per cent of these patients suffered head injuries.
- 79% of playground injuries involve falls from the equipment.

The Facts: Playground injuries are most often a result of:

- falls from a height onto a hard surface.
- strangulation when drawstrings or other loose clothing catch on gaps or spaces in the play equipment
- head and neck entrapment can occur when a child's legs slip through an opening but the child's head then becomes trapped.
- fingers or other body parts getting caught in play equipment by being crushed, pinched or cut.

The Acts: To reduce the risk of injury on the playground:

- Supervise all young children closely and carefully. Encourage them to use equipment that is meant for their age and skill level.
- Choose equipment that combines safety and fun. Ensure that the play equipment meets the CSA standard. An approved impact-absorbing surface should be placed under and around all play equipment.
- Remove drawstrings and scarves from children's clothing.
- Take off bike helmets before playing on the playground, as helmets can easily become caught in playground equipment.
- As well, do not allow skipping ropes on or around play equipment.
- Ensure that your children always wear shoes.
- Encourage children to:
 - Be alert to moving things like, like swings
 - Slide down feet-first while sitting up; only one person on the slide at a time.
 - Avoid pushing or horseplay while on play equipment.
 - Hold on with both hands when swinging and climbing.

For children under 5 years of age:

- Keep them off equipment higher than 1.5m (5 feet). You should always be able to reach your child and be able to prevent them from falling.

- Use age-appropriate equipment. If your child needs help climbing the equipment, it is meant for older children.
- Stay close to your child and follow them around the play equipment.

For children 5-9 years of age:

- Children at this age are more likely to take risks. Supervise your children closely and teach them how to use the equipment appropriately.

Remember, the goal is to ensure that children have a safe environment while they play. Children can still take risks and enjoy themselves at the playground if you plan-it safe! For further information on how you can prevent injuries, contact your local health unit or Plan-it Safe at CHEO

Sources: CHEO CHIRPP Database, Safe Kids Canada, Parks and Recreation Association, Plan-it Safe