

Risk Alerts

Protecting against the dangers of playtime

It is difficult to think of a playground as a place of danger. Yet, too often, it is. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 200,000 playground accidents cause children to be transported to the emergency room each year. That means 548 children are significantly injured every day on a playground. Unfortunately, these often turn fatal. On average, 15 children die every year from playground-related injuries. Most deaths are due to strangulation or falls.

- Recently, a three-year-old girl accidentally hung herself on a playground-climbing frame. She was unsupervised at the time.
- A two-year-old girl was hospitalized with a fractured skull and broken back after she fell and an improperly anchored swing set toppled onto her.

Both of these accidents were preventable if proper safety measures were followed.

Inspect playgrounds on a regular basis

Playgrounds should be inspected on a regular basis. If any of the following conditions are noted, they should be removed, corrected or repaired immediately to prevent injuries.

1. **Landing areas** — Provide a landing surface under and around equipment that has at least 12 inches of soft material for landing. Grass and asphalt lack true shock-absorbing properties. Some acceptable materials include sand, mulch, wood chips or safety-tested rubber.
2. **Proper coverage** — The proper protective surface around the equipment should extend at least 6 feet in all directions. For swings, the protective surface should extend twice the height of the suspending bar to the front and back.
3. **Proper spacing** — Play structures more than 30 inches high need to be spaced at least 9 feet apart.
4. **Sharp edges** — Check for sharp edges and protrusions. Hardware most likely to be hazardous is open "S" hooks and protruding bolts.
5. **Entrapment** — Look for spaces that could entrap children, such as openings in guardrails or between ladder rungs and climbing ropes. Openings must measure less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches.
6. **Trip hazards** — Remove trip hazards, such as tree stumps and rocks. Cover exposed concrete footings.
7. **Guardrails** — Ensure that any elevated surface, such as platforms and ramps, has guardrails to prevent falls.
8. **Check for wear** — Check that the equipment is not becoming loose, damaged or worn.
9. **Proper anchoring** — All equipment needs to be properly anchored to the ground.
10. **Suffocation hazards** — Do not allow loose hanging ropes on equipment. An attached jump rope to play equipment can entangle a child and cause the child to suffocate.
11. **Supervise** — Children must be supervised at all times on the playground to ensure they are safe. The younger the children are, the higher the adult-to-child-supervision ratio should be. Never leave children alone on play equipment.

Promote playground safety

Bumps and bruises are part of every child's life. The last thing that anyone wants is for one of those bumps and bruises to be from a life-threatening playground injury. Inspecting the playground and equipment and immediately correcting any adverse condition can mean a giant step toward a safe playtime.