

know risk

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Playground safety

Playgrounds are common within child related facilities and often are the source of numerous injuries. Approx 120,000 children need medical help for playground injuries each year and 19 children a day are admitted to hospital as a result of injuring themselves on playground equipment. Most injuries occur to children who are between 5 and 9 years of age.

Falling from equipment

75% of injuries occur as a result of falls from play equipment. Usually the injury is to the wrist, forearm, elbow, shoulder and head. Where the child falls onto another piece of equipment or a hard surface the damage can be more severe with abdominal, neck and spinal injuries.

In order to reduce this risk a soft surface should be present where equipment is over 500mm high. Pine bark chips, river sand, mulch or synthetic surfaces are all acceptable materials but surfaces should be 300mm deep in high impact zones.

Loose surfaces such as mulch or sand will need to be continually monitored to ensure that the surface does not become thinned out under swings or other high use areas.

Soft surfaces should be present in all "fall zones" that is, at least 1.9m beyond the equipment. All platforms higher than 500mm should have guard rails and hand rails fitted.

Cuts, pinches & protruding parts

Poorly designed equipment can also present numerous hazards such as:

- Sharp edges – not just on equipment but on borders as well
- Moving parts which can crush or pinch small fingers
- Hooks, bolts or other protruding parts can gouge children or catch on their clothing.

Trapped heads & fingers

- Openings less than 700mm wide can trap hands and limbs
- Fingers can be trapped in openings and holes between 8mm and 25mm in width.
- Heads can become trapped in openings between 100mm and 230mm

Sun safety

Many of us are sun conscious and we know that children are extremely vulnerable in this respect. Where possible, try to orchestrate some form of shade. This might be in the form of trees (a long term solution), shade sails, or building structures. Don't forget that exposure to direct sun will ensure that metal surfaces heat up quickly causing burns to children's skin upon direct contact.

Active supervision

Of all the possible measures to prevent injury there is no substitute for active close supervision. A word of caution or physically intervening in dangerous situations goes a long way to preventing injuries in playgrounds. You can encourage good supervision by providing a shaded area with seating and a good view of the play area. Supervisors should ensure that children only play on equipment which is suitable for their age and that they only use equipment in the manner for which it was designed.

Further information about playground safety can be attained from the Dept. of Education & Early Childhood Development, Vic. in their publication "Outdoor Play Guide for Vic Children's Services."

<http://www.eduweb.vic.edu.au>

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