

# facts on

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## Playground Safety

*Playground equipment calls out to children — climb, swing, whirl. It's a pleasure to watch children involved in the excitement of playground activities. We assume public playgrounds are safe. However, every year in Saskatchewan, children between the ages of one and nine years are hospitalized due to playground injuries.*

### Types of Injuries

Falls are the leading cause of injury on playgrounds at home, public parks and schools. Entanglement of a child's head, neck or other body part due to loose clothing, scarves or ropes can cause serious injury to a child as well as entrapment of the head, neck or other body part in a space in equipment. Pinches, cuts and crushes to finger, burns from hot slides and abrasions from splintered or rough surfaces are other injuries to children while they are playing.

### Keeping Children Safe

There are several things parents and caregivers can do to ensure that children are safe when using playgrounds.

### Playground Equipment

The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) produced the standard on Children's Playspace's and Equipment (CAN/CSA Z614-14). This standard includes information on the design, installation and maintenance of public playgrounds and equipment. A recent edition of the standard includes recommendations on how to design playspaces that are inclusive for children with physical disabilities. These safety standards are voluntary and aim at improving the safety of play equipment in Canada. Parents can use the standard to check the playground equipment in their neighborhood or at their child's school.

*(A Playground Checklist of things to look for is on the back of this fact sheet).*

### Supervision is Key

- Children between the ages of 5 and 9 experience the greatest number of injuries and supervision is extremely important for this age group.
- Children under 5 years of age should be within an arm's reach when climbing on heights above the ground or playing on a swing.

### Clothing

- Children should not wear clothing with hoods, strings or other parts that can get caught on play equipment.

### Instruct Children in Safe Playground Behaviour

Teach your child behaviours that are appropriate. Give them rules to follow:

- No pushing on equipment
- Make room for others
- Wait your turn
- Feet first down the slide
- Do not run up or down slides
- Always hold hand rails
- Never jump from unsafe heights
- Do not stand at the bottom of slides or in front of swings
- Keep fingers away from moving parts
- Equipment will be slippery when wet

Only by becoming involved can caregivers be sure that their local playground is and remains a safe place for their children to play. Parents must also remember, however, that a safe playground environment includes more than just safe equipment.

# Playground Checklist

Work within your community to ensure that the playground in your area is safe for all the children who play there. Before allowing your child to play in any playground, inspect the play area for:

## **A safe surface**

These include rubber, woodchips, fine sand, or pea gravel, at least 15 - 30 cm (6 - 12 in.) deep depending on the height of the equipment and the type of material. Grass, soil and hard-packed dirt are not safe as they do not protect the child. Check for dangerous items such as stumps, needles, or glass. The safe surface area should extend a minimum of 1.8 m (6 ft.) around each piece of play equipment. For swings, the distance is twice the height from the top of the swing structure to the swing seat. Beware of placement of equipment near wood or concrete curbing.

## **The distance between pieces of equipment**

Stationary equipment should be at least 1.8 m (6 ft.) apart so that children cannot fall from one piece of equipment onto another. Moving equipment and slide exits should be at least 3.6 - 5.5 m (12 - 18 ft.) from other moving or stationary equipment.

## **Guardrails and Protective Barriers**

Guardrails are required for elevated surfaces greater than 50 cm (20 in.) above protective surfacing for children less than 5 years of age and for elevated surfaces greater than 75 cm (30 in.) above protective surfacing for children 5 to 12 years of age. Protective barriers provide added protection on higher surfaces by preventing children from climbing over or through them. Protective barriers are required on elevated surfaces greater than 75 cm (30 in.) above protective surfacing for children less than 5 years of age and for elevated surfaces greater than 120 cm (48 in.) above protective surfacing for children 5 to 12 years of age.

## **Entrapment areas**

Ensure that children will not get their heads trapped in small openings. Look for poorly spaced rungs on stairs and steps, and holes and angles that could allow a child's body through but not the child's head. Safe spaces in equipment are smaller than 8.8 cm or larger than 22.9 cm. Children should always remove bicycle helmets before playing on equipment as they increase the risk of entrapment.

## **Loose, sharp, or damaged equipment**

Loose or protruding pieces on the equipment may catch clothing and clothing strings. Sharp projecting parts, such as nuts and bolts, or exposed moving parts can cut or crush parts of the child's body.

## **General maintenance of the playground**

Check for loose splinters, decay, and cracks in wood and plastic. Look for chipped paint and rust on metal. Look for deterioration in the structure and see that equipment is properly anchored to the ground.

## **Open water**

There should not be any open water; paddling pools should be fenced as children can drown in less than 5 cm (2 in.) of water.

## **Appropriate equipment**

Playgrounds should have separate play areas for very young children. Playgrounds should also be accessible to all children, including children with disabilities.

## **Location**

Playgrounds should be strategically located to keep children away from the street. They should be accessible by safe road crossings. Traffic speed around playgrounds should also be controlled.

Information for this fact sheet was adapted from:  
*Canadian Standards Association. CAN/CSA- Z6414-14. Children's Playspaces and Equipment, 2014.*

*Public Health Agency of Canada: CHIRRP. Injuries Associated with Playground Equipment. 2000. [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/injury-bles/chirpp/injreprables/pdf/playground\\_e.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/injury-bles/chirpp/injreprables/pdf/playground_e.pdf)*

*Safe Kids Canada. Playground tips and frequently asked questions. May 28, 2010. <http://www.safekidsCanada.ca/Parents/Safety-Information/Playground-Safety/Playground-Safety-Tips/Playground-Tips.aspx>*

*Saskatchewan Prevention Institute, Child & Youth Injury in Saskatchewan, 2002.*