

# facts on

## For More Information Contact:

1319 Colony Street  
Saskatoon, SK S7N 2Z1  
Bus. 306.651.4300  
Fax. 306.651.4301  
info@skprevention.ca  
www.skprevention.ca

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Government of Saskatchewan  
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Foundation  
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## Playground Safety

*Playground equipment calls out to children — climb, swing, whirl. Playgrounds are crucial for promoting the healthy development and well-being of children. Playing in a playground has many social, behavioural, mental, and physical benefits. Providing a safe environment for children to play can significantly reduce the risk of severe injuries.*

### Types of Injuries

In Saskatchewan, playground injuries are one of the leading causes of hospitalization for children aged 1-9.

- **Falls and bumps** on hard playground equipment can cause **traumatic brain injuries** that may range from mild concussions to serious skull fractures.
- **Entanglement** may occur if a child's head, neck or other body part becomes tangled in loose clothing, scarves, ropes, and small spaces in playground equipment. Entanglement can lead to **strangulation** and other serious injuries.
- **Pinches, cuts, scrapes, burns** from hot slides, **and abrasions** from splintered or rough surfaces can occur while children are playing.

### Keeping Children Safe

There are several steps caregivers can take to ensure that children are safe when using playgrounds.

### Check Playground Equipment

The Canadian Standards Association has produced the *National Standard of Canada: Children's Playground Equipment and Surfacing* (CSA Z614-20). This standard includes information on the design, construction, installation, maintenance, and inspection of public playgrounds and equipment. It also includes recommendations for inclusive design for children with physical disabilities and considerations for managing extreme temperatures. These voluntary safety standards aim to minimize the

possibility of life-threatening injuries on play equipment in Canada.

*A checklist of things to look for in playgrounds is included on the back of this fact sheet.*

### Actively Supervise Children

As children become more independent, active supervision is important because they may not understand danger and will not always remember safety rules. Being aware of your child's skills and abilities will help you know when it is safe to give them more freedom.

- For children under 5 years of age, stay within arm's reach while they use play equipment such as swings, raised platforms, and slides.
- For children over 5 years of age, observe them while they play and step in when they are doing something that is not safe for themselves or others.

### Ensure Children Wear Safe Clothing

Children should not be wearing anything that may get entangled in equipment. Before using playground equipment:

- Remove your child's scarf, helmet, and clothing with hoods.
- Remove drawstrings, cords, straps, or strings from your child's clothing.

### Instruct Children in Safe Playground Behaviour

A safe playground environment includes more than just safe equipment. Encourage children to follow safe play habits, including:

- Make room for others and wait their turn
- Wear shoes on the playground
- Go down the slide sitting down and feet first
- Do not stand at the bottom of slides or in front of swings
- Go up steps slowly and always use the handrails
- Do not climb on guardrails
- Swing sitting down and keep both hands on the swing
- Do not jump from unsafe heights
- Keep fingers away from moving parts

# Playground Safety Checklist

Work within your community to ensure that the playground(s) in your area is safe for all children who play there. If you notice a structure or surface that is unsafe, report any issues to park or school staff.

Before allowing your child to play in any playground, check for:

## 1. **Safe surface(s)**

- Choose playgrounds with sand, pea gravel, wood chips, or shredded rubber on the ground below play structures.
  - Safe surfaces should be at least 15 – 30 cm (6-12in.) deep depending on the height of the equipment and the type of materials.
  - The safe surface area should extend a minimum of 1.8m (6 ft.) deep depending on the height of the equipment.
- Regularly check playground for hazards (e.g., broken equipment, broken glass, needles).
- Make sure the playground equipment is dry and not slippery.

## 2. **Measures to prevent burns**

Hot surfaces during warmer seasons can cause burns. Factor that can decrease the risks of burns include:

- playground equipment shaded by canopies or trees
- painted or galvanized metal structures
- plastic structures located in low sun exposure areas
- light-colored play structures that minimize heat absorption

## 3. **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.
- Equipment that moves and slide exits should be at least 3.6 - 5.5 m (12 - 18 ft.) from all other equipment.
- For swings, the distance between seats should be at least 0.6 m (2 ft.).

## 4. **Guardrails and protective barriers**

For children under 5 years old:

- Guardrails are required for elevated surfaces greater than 50 cm (20 in.) above protective surfacing.
- Protective barriers that prevent children from climbing over or through them are required for elevated surfaces greater than 75 cm (30 in.).

For children between 5 - 12 years old:

- Guardrails are required for elevated surfaces greater than 75 cm (30 in.) above protective surfacing.
- Protective barriers are required for elevated surfaces greater than 120 cm (48 in.) above protective surfacing.

## 5. **Entrapment areas**

Ensure that children will not get their heads trapped in small openings. Look for poorly spaced rungs on stairs and steps. This includes spaces between railings, holes and angles that could allow a child's body through but not the child's head. Spaces in equipment should be smaller than 8.8 cm (3 in.) or larger than 22.9 cm (9 in.).

## 6. **Maintenance of playground equipment**

Ensure playground equipment does not have loose joints, open chains, sharp edges, exposed nails and bolts, rust or broken parts. Exposed parts can cut or crush parts of a child's body or catch on loose clothing.

- Check for loose splinters, decay, and cracks in wood and plastic. Playground equipment should have a smooth surface.
- Look for chipped paint and rust on metal and deterioration in the playground structure.
- Ensure that all equipment is properly anchored to the ground.

## 7. **Open water**

Any open water in or near the playground area, including paddling pools, should be fenced in. Children can drown in less than 2.5 cm (1 in.) of water.

## 8. **Appropriate equipment**

- Playgrounds should have a separate play area for children under 5 years of age.
- If needed, ensure that playgrounds have safe, accessible equipment that can be used by children with disabilities.

## Resources

School Zone and Playground Zone Safety - <https://caask.ca/about-cao/advocacy-safety/school-zone-playground-zone-safety>

Canadian Standards Association: CSA Z614:20 Children's playground Standards - <https://www.csagroup.org/store/product/CSA%20Z614%3A20/>