



# Playground Safety

Each year thousands of children suffer from playground injuries ranging from abrasions and cuts to broken limbs and concussions. These injuries can even cause death. While children should be challenged and allowed to test their limits during outdoor play, there is a lot we can do to prevent or reduce injuries without sacrificing play value.

- Borrow or buy *Children's Playspaces and Equipment*. This book, produced by the Canadian Standards Association, provides design and maintenance standards for play structures and play areas.
- Establish a procedure for regular playground checks. Post the playground checklist and encourage staff and parents to take part.
- Develop a routine safety maintenance plan. Involve parents, children and the community in safety activities such as gathering sticks and papers, raking grass and sanding wood.
- Supervise outdoor play closely. Develop policies to ensure that the child-adult ratio is adequate. Adults should be interacting with the children, not with each other, on the playground.
- Make sure all drawstrings, cords and scarves are securely tucked inside snowsuits and coats, and that no ropes are tied on any playground structures. These items can strangle a child.
- Protect children from the sun. Plant vegetation, erect fences and awnings and build play equipment so that they provide shelter for playing children.
- Provide play experiences for children of differing abilities without compromising safety. Safety precautions may include equipping some children with helmets<sup>1</sup>, or putting seatbelts on children who use wheelchairs.

1. Helmets can also be a safety concern on playgrounds. Children should not wear bike or other sport helmets at the playground, since a child wearing a helmet may fall and be caught dangling by the helmet in a space otherwise large enough for the child to fall through.

## Further reading

Mauffette, A.G., L. Fréchette, D. Robertson (1999). *Revisiting Children's Outdoor Equipment: a Focus on Design, Play and Safety*. Hull, QC: Gauvin. ISBN 2-921582-04-X

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (1997). *Playspaces for Preschoolers*. Ottawa: author

Canadian Standards Association (1998). *Children's Playspaces and Equipment: National Standard of Canada*. Etobicoke, ON: Author. CAN/CSA-Z614-98

## Playground Checklist

- Is the playspace away from dangerous activities or areas?
- Is the space between each piece of equipment sufficient (generally six feet) to prevent children from colliding into equipment?
- Have foreign objects or obstructions been removed from fall zones under and around fixed equipment?
- Is equipment smoothly finished and generally in good repair (no sharp edges, loose or broken parts)?
- Have all worn S-hooks, chains and bolts been replaced on swings? Are all S-hooks tightly closed?
- Is the end portion of the slide at least 11 inches long?
- Do slides have large decks with handrails at the top and no small spaces that can catch drawstrings or clothing?
- Do play structures with closed spaces allow air to circulate sufficiently to control temperature?
- Does the playspace have varied and appropriate surface materials? For example, is satisfactory shock-absorbing surface material located beneath raised equipment? Is the sand or ground cover under equipment 8 – 10 inches deep?
- Is most of the play area and interesting equipment in deep shade between 11:00 am and 2:00 pm?
- Are health hazards from animal contamination minimized (sandbox sand raked or sterilized, hands washed after outdoor play)?
- Is the playground free of areas where standing water or other debris can collect?
- Are wooden play structures preserved with non-toxic materials?
- Are children closely supervised?
- Are the climbing areas, where children could fall, less than six feet high?
- Could a child get caught anywhere? For example, are there any openings 3.5 – 9 inches wide that could entrap a child's head?