

Making Communities Safe

Playground Safety Key for Youngest Athletes

By Daniel Solomon, MD

We form some of our earliest athletic experiences on playgrounds and on the blacktop. Unfortunately injuries occur with some frequency in these areas. The key to stopping some of the 250,000 annual playground injuries in the United States is prevention. Monkey bars, swings, and slides account for the majority of injuries, with monkey bars causing more than 75,000 doctor's visits annually and swings and slides causing around 50,000 injuries each. Here's a few tips to help prevent a trip to the emergency room:

- Pay attention to the equipment, age, and activities of other children and general condition of the playground. Often it is not only the equipment, but a child's behavior or actions that lead to injury.
- Look for loose, damaged, or missing supports, and exposed anchors, footings, nuts, bolts, or other connectors.
- Keep an eye out for bending, warping, rusting, or breakage of any components, or sharp edges due to wear or breakage.
- Clean up trash in the area (particularly glass or cans); don't allow play around environmental hazards such as roots, rocks, or poor drainage areas.
- Keep your child on age-appropriate and height-appropriate equipment.
- Utilize playgrounds that have surfaces constructed from appropriate softer material such as rubber or loose fill, such as double-shredded bark mulch, engineered wood fibers, sand, and fine or medium gravel of suitable depth. Unsuitable surfaces include asphalt, concrete, soil, packed dirt, grass, and turf.
- Don't allow children under 3 to ride on slides in someone else's lap. Their legs can get caught and twisted leading to lower leg fractures.
- Look for playgrounds with areas for active play such as swings separated from areas for quiet play like sandboxes. Play areas for preschoolers and older children should be kept apart as well.



- Make sure you can see your child at all times.
- Look for a barrier around the playground to prevent children from running into a street, especially near basketball or other ball courts.
- Ensure the landing area at the bottom of a slide or the area immediately surrounding a merry-go-round is free from other children.

Schools and cities should keep playgrounds in good condition by inspecting and maintaining the equipment throughout the year. Heavy rainfall, snow, extreme temperatures, and high winds can damage playground equipment. Heavy use can also cause equipment to wear out quickly. If you find a particular hazard, let the group responsible for the playground know as soon as possible! Most importantly, play safe and have fun!

Prepared by the
Stop Sports Injuries
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