

Ten steps toward a safer playground



Use this checklist to inspect your local school or community playground. If you mark any items, ask the proper school or park official to correct these hazards immediately—before injuries occur.

- Protective Surfacing.** The surfaces under and around play equipment should be soft enough to cushion falls. For most play equipment, these surfaces should contain a minimum of 12 inches of wood chips, mulch, sand, or pea gravel. For more information on the proper surfacing materials, call the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) Hotline at 800-638-2772.
- Use Zones.** To cushion a fall, the shock absorbing material should extend a minimum of 6 feet in all directions from stationary pieces of play equipment. In front of and behind swings, the material should extend a distance equal to twice the height of the suspending bar.
- Equipment Spacing.** Play structures more than 30 inches high should be spaced at least 9 feet apart to allow children space to circulate or fall without striking another structure. Moving pieces of equipment should be located in an area away from other play structures so children have adequate room to pass from one play area to another without being struck by a moving swing or by another child exiting from a slide.
- Catch Points and Protruding Hardware.** There should be no dangerous pieces of hardware, such as protruding bolt ends and narrow gaps in metal connections or “S” hooks at the top and bottom of swings. Exposed hardware can cut children, puncture skin, or catch clothing drawstrings, which could strangle a child.
- Openings that can trap.** Openings in guardrails, and spaces between platforms and between ladder rungs, should measure less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches. Children can get trapped and strangle in openings where they can fit their bodies but not their heads through the space.
- Pinch, Crush, Shearing, and Sharp Hazards.** Equipment should not have sharp points or edges that could cut skin. Moving pieces of equipment, such as suspension bridges, track rides, merry-go-rounds, or seesaws should not have accessible moving parts that might crush or pinch a child’s finger.
- Tripping Hazards.** There should be no exposed concrete footings, abrupt changes in surface elevations, tree roots, tree stumps, and rocks which can trip children or adults.

- Guardrails.** Elevated surfaces such as platforms, ramps, and bridgeways should have guardrails to prevent falls.
- Routine Maintenance.** Find out if your playground has a designated official who periodically inspects the play equipment for preventive maintenance. This includes: replacing missing, broken, or worn-out components; securing hardware; checking for deterioration in the wood, metal, or plastic materials; maintaining the proper 12-inch depth of surfacing material; and cleaning up debris.
- Supervision.** The play area should be designed so that adults can observe children at play.

For more detailed information, order CPSC's *Handbook for Public Playground Safety* (EDC-134), from ISU Extension Distribution Center, Printing and Publications Building, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011; phone, 515-294-5247; fax, 515-294-2945. Or obtain it directly from the CPSC web site: <http://www.cpsc.gov>.

To report a dangerous product or a product-related injury and for information on CPSC's fax-on-demand service, call CPSC's hotline at 800-638-2772 or CPSC teletypewriter at 800-638-8270. To obtain information by fax-on-demand, call 301-504-0051 from the handset of a fax machine and follow the instructions for ordering documents. Consumers can obtain recall information via Internet gopher services at cpsc.gov or report hazard to info@cpsc.gov.

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