

PLAYGROUND SAFETY

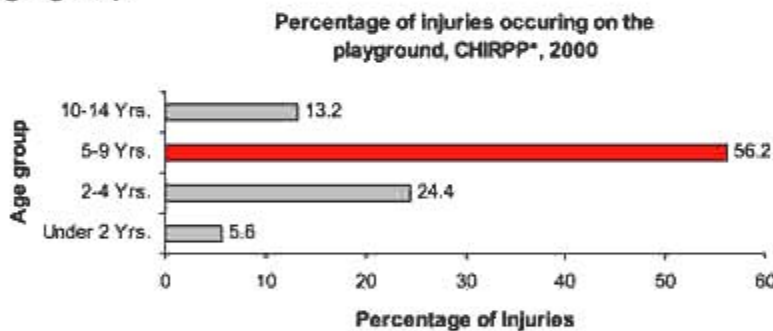


After school, many children head to their neighbourhood playground to have a good time. Unfortunately some will get hurt, BUT serious injuries to these children can be prevented!

Scrapes and bruises are going to happen but broken bones can be avoided. Children have even died on the playground, mostly from suffocation by drawstrings on clothing, skipping ropes or by getting their head stuck in open spaces of the playground equipment. There have been at least 18 deaths in Canada since 1982 on playgrounds [CHIRPP 1999].

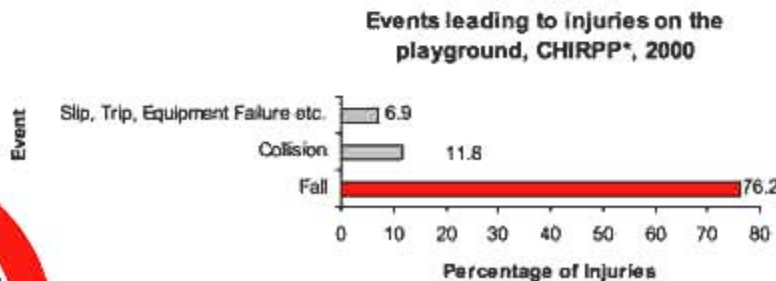
Who gets hurt?

While boys are slightly more likely to get hurt than girls, children between the ages of 5 and 9 are more than twice as likely to get hurt than any other age group.



How do they get hurt?

More than **75%** of all playground injuries seen by emergency departments happen because of a **fall**, while the second most common cause of injury occurs as a result of a **collision**, often with a stationary object.



A 4-year-old boy suffocated when he got stuck and hung upside down on an indoor playground at a fast food restaurant.

A young boy broke his ankle after falling only 1.5 meters off the monkey bars.

A 4-year-old girl was pushed from a swing and suffered a spinal cord injury.

One child died after being strangled by the chin strap of a cycling helmet; the helmet became wedged between two parts of a playground structure.



PLAYGROUND INJURIES

*The Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting & Prevention Program (CHIRPP) is an emergency department based injury surveillance program. There are 15 participating hospitals throughout Canada, including BC's Children's Hospital in BC.

CHOOSING A SAFER PLAYGROUND



Although most playgrounds are properly fenced off from traffic, make sure your children know to stay within the boundaries. Also, outdoor playgrounds can be littered with garbage, broken glass and other dangerous objects. It's up to us to keep playgrounds clean!

Remember this simple checklist*:

- S** - supervision
- A** - age appropriateness
- F** - fall cushioning
- E** - equipment



SUPERVISION:

- There should be adults present to monitor children and to make sure that the equipment is used for its intended purpose (e.g., don't climb on slides).
- Older children should be easily visible on the playground while younger children should be within arm's length.

AGE APPROPRIATENESS:

- Most playgrounds have two main structures - one for younger children (under age 6) and one for intermediate children (over age 6).
- These structures differ in their height off the ground and relative safety features (e.g., higher protective rails).

FALL CUSHIONING:

- There should be suitable surface material used for cushioning (e.g., pea gravel, wood chips, rubber chips, rubber mats). Sand and grass lose their cushioning effect after a while.
- Good cushioning is maintained with an appropriate depth (minimum of 6 inches or the depth of a hand). If the surface material has been scattered from an area (i.e., under the slide) then return some material to the area.

EQUIPMENT:

- Stay away from broken equipment.
- The bolts should be in good condition and not rusted or sticking out.
- Do not play on equipment that is missing parts.

* Adapted from National Program for Playground Safety, University of Northern Iowa
Suggested reading: "Children's Playspaces and Equipment Canada"
produced by the Canadian Safety Association.

Remember: older playgrounds may not meet newer safety standards. Be extra careful when using older playgrounds.

Old metal slides can heat up in the sun and become too hot to touch.

No amount of design improvements can replace the importance of PARENTAL SUPERVISION.

B.C. Injury Research
RESEARCH CENTRE

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