

## Valuable Playground Safety Tips

Each year over 200,000 children are injured on our nations playgrounds seriously enough to require medical attention. That's one serious injury every 2 minutes. It is estimated that 75% of all injuries occur when children fall to the surface below. There are some simple steps parents and caregivers can take to help to reduce the likelihood of playground injuries:

1. As you approach the playground look for a posted sign that states the age group that the equipment was designed for. It should indicate design appropriateness for ages 2-5 or ages 5-12. Different levels of coordination and strength are required for certain elements and younger children often try to use equipment that is beyond their abilities. Encourage your child to use the proper equipment.
2. Look at the surfacing materials on the ground below the equipment. It is probably small gravel or wood chips. Look for anything that doesn't belong there like bottles, cans or other debris. Make sure there are no areas where the protective material has been worn away such as at the bottom of a slide chute or below swings. If the protective material is worn away the exposed surface can be too hard and serious injuries can result if a child falls in that area.
3. Look for tripping hazards such as loose felt, low pieces of equipment like a balance beam, tree roots or anything else that might cause a fall.
4. Make sure the slide bed is free of debris or sharp points and if it is metal feel it first to make sure it is not too hot.
5. Look out for spots where a child can get stuck like between steps, below guardrails or in small openings on metal climbers.
6. Instruct the children not to walk in front of or behind swings or other moving equipment.
7. Always keep the child in your line of sight. Tube slides and enclosed wooden structures are areas where a child can get hurt without being noticed right away.
8. Never leave children unattended at the playground. Talking with friends or reading the newspaper are not nearly as important as a child's safety. If a child's hood string gets hung up on a protruding screw or bolt and they start to choke it will only take 45 seconds for them to lose consciousness and 2 - 3 minutes for them to suffer brain damage.

9. Avoid the playground equipment if it has been raining or if the early morning dew is still present. Slippery equipment is the cause of many falls and subsequent injuries.
10. Never allow a child to use the playground equipment while wearing a helmet. These provide good protection while skating; boarding or riding a bicycle but can easily lead to a strangulation or entrapment on playground equipment.
11. Do not allow children to take toys such as canteens, hula-hoops, backpacks, etc onto play equipment. These things can easily get caught on something and lead to a child getting hurt and if they are left on the equipment they could cause someone else to trip over them.

The summer months produce a higher number of injuries than other seasons. The main reasons for this include:

- there is typically no qualified supervision at the playground
- children tend to use equipment not designed for their age group
- the inspection process by the playground owner can sometimes be less frequent due to less regular use and potential hazards are not as readily identified and corrected.

Playgrounds help children learn about themselves, their bodies, their peers and their physical environment. There is no way to completely eliminate the possibility of an injury on a playground however it is up to us to take the time to check out the play environments our children use.

Thank you for taking the time to work toward keeping all kids safe!

If you have any questions about general playground safety issues please feel free to contact Utica National Insurance Group at 1-800-274-1914 extension 2442.

