



National Recreation and Park Association

Playground Safety Fact Sheet *Five Things Every Parent Should Know*

Each year, more than 200,000 injuries happen on playgrounds. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has provided five quick tips for adults, so they can ensure that their children enjoy challenging and safe play experiences.

1. Check the surfacing material beneath the equipment to ensure it is acceptable.

Fact: Improper surfacing material under playground equipment is the leading cause of playground-related injuries.

Children are adventurous even as their bodies are still developing. It's important that playgrounds have proper surfaces to reduce the possibility of injuries from falls. Acceptable surfaces include things such as wood fiber and wood chips, sand, pea gravel, synthetic and rubber tiles, poured-in-place rubber, shredded rubber and mats. Loose surfacing such as wood chips should be at a depth of 12 inches and be freestanding of water and debris. Unacceptable surfaces include concrete, blacktop, packed earth and grass.

2. Check the temperature of equipment surfaces.

Fact: Hot surfaces in direct sunlight can reach temperatures high enough to cause serious contact burn injuries in a matter of seconds.

Playing in the sun is glorious, but younger children often don't have the reflexes to pull back from hot surfaces before an injury occurs. Be sure to check playground equipment such as metal decks, slides and steps before allowing young children access. In addition, proper footwear can serve as good protection for feet.

3. Be observant of the conditions of the playground.

Fact: After falls, the next leading cause of injuries on playgrounds is related to breakage, tip-over, design and assembly of equipment.

Parents should be observant, making note if an area or the equipment seems neglected or poorly maintained. Red flags include things such as missing, broken or worn out components; fatigued or deteriorated metal, wood and plastic; and vandalism or graffiti. All parts of equipment should be stable with no signs of loosening, and surfacing material should be maintained.

4. Supervision and proper clothing can reduce risk.

Fact: It is estimated that 40 percent of playground injuries are associated with a lack of supervision.

Young children are constantly challenging their own abilities and often are not able to recognize potential hazards. Parents and caregivers should observe children at play at all times to reduce the possibility of accidents. Special attention should also be paid to a child's clothing, as drawstrings and jewelry can become entangled in equipment and protruding hardware, and can cause death by strangulation.

5. Ensure the equipment is age-appropriate.

Fact: Preschool-aged children (2 to 5) have developmental needs that differ greatly from school-aged children (5 to 12).

It is important to make sure that playground equipment is appropriate for the age of the user. Equipment not recommended for preschoolers includes free-standing arch climbers and flexible climbers, chain and cable walks, fulcrum seesaws, log rolls, track rides and vertical sliding poles.

These tips have been developed from NRPA's "The Dirty Dozen," a comprehensive twelve-point inspection guide for playground safety, as well as the Consumer Product Safety Commission 2010 Public Playground Safety Handbook. Adults who identify potential hazards are encouraged to notify the owner or operator of the playground so that they make take steps to eliminate them.

A free copy of "The Dirty Dozen" is available for download on the NRPA website at www.nrpa.org/playgroundsafety.

The National Recreation and Park Association is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing park, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through its network of 20,000 recreation and park professionals and citizens, NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy lifestyles, recreation initiatives, and conservation of natural and cultural resources. For more information, visit www.NRPA.org. For digital access to NRPA's flagship publication, *Parks & Recreation*, visit www.parksandrecreation.org.

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