

Safety Fact Sheet

Ball Pits



What is a Ball Pit?

Ball pits are enclosures of various shapes and sizes filled with small colourful hollow plastic balls. Ball pits are usually used as a means of recreation and exercise for young children. They can be relatively shallow or deep enough to allow complete immersion, making it possible for children to disappear from view.

How may a child be injured?

Infection and illness

- Bacteria present in ball pits can result in children contracting various illnesses such as upper respiratory tract infections and diarrhoea. As rubbish may collect at the bottom of the pit, sources of infection are out of sight.

Cuts, bruises and broken bones

- Children have received cuts, bruises and, in some cases, broken bones when they have been jumped or trampled on in ball pits.

Crushed

- Children can be crushed by other children when hiding under balls, particularly if slides are attached to the ball pit.

Suffocation

- Suffocation can occur if children are unable to surface under the weight of other children.

Allergy and anaphylaxis

- Latex contained in the plastic balls could lead to allergic reactions in some children and, in extreme cases, severe anaphylactic shock.

How common are these injuries?

Ball pits have been demonstrated to house bacterial organisms which present a potential health risk to children¹. Deeper pits conceal the bottom and allow for debris to build up; claims have been made that syringes, knives and diapers (among other things) have been found at the bottom of these pits.² One Italian study found that ball pits had been associated with anaphylaxis in some children³.

Additionally, rough play in ball pits has resulted in children sustaining fractures. In one extreme case a 13-year-old boy, hidden under balls at the base of a slide, died when other teenagers came down on top of him.⁴

Is there a Law or an Australian Standard for ball pits?

There are no laws or Australian Standards relating to ball pits. Please keep in mind the safety reminders below when allowing your child to use a ball pit.

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Remember:

- Wash your child's hands thoroughly before and after they play in a ball pit.
- Ensure that ball pits are cleaned regularly before allowing your child to play in one. Ball Pits should be thoroughly cleaned at least once per week.
- Make sure your child can be seen at all times whilst playing in the ball pit.
- Never leave your child unsupervised in a ball pit.
- Ensure your child does not engage in rough play whilst in the ball pit (i.e. jumping on other children, throwing balls at other children, etc).
- A child of toddler age or younger should always be accompanied by an adult to prevent any potential injuries from older children.
- Do not allow your child to enter an overcrowded ball pit.

¹ Davis, S., Corbitt, A., Everton, V. Grano, C., Kiefner, P., Wilson, A. Gray, M., "Are ball pits the playground for potentially harmful bacteria?" *Pediatric Nursing*. 1999:25(2):151-155.

² Jordan, M., *Playing It Safe at Indoor Playgrounds*, 2006.

<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/parents/solutions/information/article.php?contentId=56640>

³ Fiocchi, A., Restani, P. Ballabio, C. Bouygue, G. Serra, A. Travaini, M. and Terracciano, L. "Severe anaphylaxis induced by latex as a contaminant of plastic balls in play pits," *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*. 2001:108(2):298-300.

⁴ Tinsworth, D., McDonald, J., *Special Study: Injuries and Deaths Associated with Children's Playground Equipment*, Consumer Product Safety Commission, USA, 2001.

<http://www.cpsc.gov/library/playgrnd.pdf>