

Fact Sheet

Playgrounds



What are Playgrounds?

Playgrounds are public areas located in parks, schools and other recreational facilities and contain equipment on which children can play. Playgrounds generally consist of a number of pieces of play equipment, such as a swing.



How may a child be injured?

Cuts and bruises

- Children may fall from a piece of equipment or be injured by other children using the play equipment, which can result in cuts and bruises.
- Protruding parts and sharp edges on playground equipment can also cause cuts and bruises.

Entrapment

- Some playgrounds may have equipment that children could get trapped in. Tunnels and other equipment that provide access to spaces may cause children to get their head, body or limbs trapped.



Falls

- Many pieces of playground equipment are located some distance from ground level. Injuries can occur when a child loses balance or does not have the strength to hold on appropriately to a piece of equipment.

Strangulation

- Playgrounds with loose ropes, wires or other pieces of equipment that are free flowing and not anchored down should be avoided as they can cause strangulation.
- Protruding hooks and bolts can catch children's clothing and could cause strangulation.
- If a child's head becomes entrapped and the child is unable to reach a surface to support their body weight, they could be strangled.



Struck by object

- A child may be struck by an object being operated by others at the playground or be struck by other children using equipment such as swings, monkey bars etc.

How common are these injuries?

In Victoria, Hospital admissions linked to playground equipment were higher than for any other group of consumer products used by children (aged 0-14 years). In the two year period July 2002-June 2004, there were at least 7,862 hospital-treated playground equipment injuries.¹ There are no recent published statistics available for NSW.



Is there a Law or an Australian Standard for Playground Equipment?

Australian Standards apply to the manufacture of play equipment to be installed in public places. There are however, no Australian Standards relating to the installation of playground equipment in the home.



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It is recommended that when manufacturing and/or installing playground equipment compliance with the following Australian Standards be applied:

- AS 4685 Parts 1-6: 2004 General safety requirements for playground equipment
- AS/NZ 4422: 1996 Playground Surfacing, Specifications, Requirements and Test Methods
- AS/NZ 4486.1: 1997 Playground and playground equipment, Part 1: Development, installation, inspection, maintenance and operation
- AS 2555: 1982 Supervised Adventure Playgrounds: Guide to Establishment and Administration
- AS 1428.3: 1992 Design for Access and Mobility. Requirements for Children and Adolescents with Physical Disabilities

These Australian Standards are voluntary standards that manufacturers are not required to meet, however The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Kaleidoscope suggest that you purchase and use playground equipment that meet these standards. If you choose to purchase or use playground equipment that does not meet Australian Standards, please keep in mind the safety reminders below:

Remember:

- The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Kaleidoscope recommend that you purchase and use playground equipment that meet the above Australian Standards.
- The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Kaleidoscope recommend that you check for products that have been recalled (www.recalls.gov.au) prior to buying or borrowing an item for use with your child.
- The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Kaleidoscope recommend that you check second hand goods for wear and tear prior to buying or borrowing an item for use with your child.
- When at a playground remember:
 - It is very important to supervise children
 - Ensure the children under your care only play on age-appropriate equipment
 - Make sure the children under your care have appropriate sun protection.
 - Make sure the children under your care have appropriate clothing and footwear.
- If installing playground equipment at home The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Kaleidoscope recommend that the guidelines below, based on Australian Standards, are followed:
 - Openings in the play equipment should be less than 89mm or more than 230mm to avoid entrapment of a child's head (AS 4685).
 - Height of equipment should be minimised so that if a child does fall, the impact will be lessened. The maximum fall height recommended is 2.5m (for children over 6 years), 1m (0-3 years) and 1.5m (3-5 years). (AS 4685.1—2004).

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- For all equipment exceeding 500mm in height, ensure there is soft material underneath the play equipment that extends 2.5m around the equipment. This soft surface needs to be 250mm deep. Soft material needs to be impact absorbing, such as loose fill (pine bark and mulch) or material such as synthetic grass or wet pour rubber. Sand is not recommended as it compacts when wet (AS/NZ 4422: 1996).
- Handrails and/or guardrails should be installed on platforms that are above 500mm high. The guardrails should be 900mm, to prevent a child from climbing any higher (AS 4685.1–2004).
- Ensure there are no rough edges or protruding parts that could cut a child's skin or tangle a child's clothing.
- Install equipment in a shady clear area that is away from driveways, pools, homes or other hazards.
- Ensure the equipment is stable and well anchored before allowing children to play.

For further information contact Kidsafe NSW Playground Advisory Committee at <http://www.kidsafensw.org/> or on Telephone (02) 9845 0890

¹ Clapperton, A and Cassell, E, *Consumer product-related injury (1): Playground equipment and trampolines*, Hazard Edition 61, 2005. Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit. Monash University Accident Research Centre.