

factsheet

playground accidents

This factsheet presents background information mainly for people working with children and families, and students undertaking projects.

Child Accident Prevention Trust publishes a range of resources for parents, carers and older children, containing comprehensive safety advice. A complete list of these resources – leaflets, booklets, posters, guides, etc – can be found at www.capt.org.uk together with details of how to obtain them.

How many children are injured in playgrounds?

In the UK in 2002:

- 172,200 children age 15 and under went to a hospital after having an accident in a playground
- 33,500 children were injured in public playgrounds
- 139,200 children were injured in school or nursery playgrounds
- In playgrounds climbing frames are most commonly involved in accidental injury, followed by swings and then slides. Other equipment less commonly involved in injury includes rope swings, seesaws and roundabouts.
- 12,400 children were injured at home when using play equipment.

What type of accidents happen in playgrounds?

Falls account for at least 75 per cent of all playground accidents. Children can slip and lose their grip or their balance when playing. Often they are hurt not only by falling from play equipment, but also by hitting the equipment as they fall.

Collisions with other children and impact with stationary or moving equipment are common causes of playground injury.

Less common types of playground accidents include:

- cuts and crush injuries resulting from contact with protrusions, pinch points and sharp edges
- strangulation when children's clothing, especially scarves, drawstrings or cords, catches on equipment
- entrapment injuries when the head or shoulders become stuck.

How can the number of playground accidents be reduced?

The design of a play area and its location have an impact on child safety.

- layout must ensure that activities in one area do not interfere with other areas
- areas for younger children must be clearly separated from that for older children
- paths must be safely sited clear of equipment areas
- clear sight lines throughout the play area make it easier to supervise children
- fencing play areas may be required if there are roads, rivers or ponds close by
- safe access for children with special needs should be considered
- lighting must be adequate for safety and supervision

The type of equipment and level of maintenance are also important factors in the number of accidents that happen:

- old or worn equipment should be repaired or replaced.
- all equipment needs to be suitable for the age of the children using it

Hard surfaces such as concrete and grass that is quickly worn away increase the likelihood of serious injury occurring when children fall or slip.

- impact absorbing surfaces may reduce injury severity
- impact absorbing surfaces include rubber, bark chips and other materials

Children need to learn safe behaviour in playgrounds. Young children need to be supervised by an adult and may be too small to use some equipment. As children get older they can use playgrounds independently. They should be taught to assess risk for themselves and to be aware of others.

Safe behaviour includes:

- not walking in front of swings or other moving equipment
- not pushing
- being aware of younger children
- removing scarves or anything else that could get caught in equipment
- taking extra care when using high equipment such as climbing frames

Further information

Capt provides a playground inspection service for local authorities and other organisations that provide play facilities. Contact **capt** on the number shown below for further information. Other sources of advice and information include:

Children's Play Information Service
8 Wakely Street
London EC1V 7QE
tel 020 7843 6008
www.ncb.org.uk

National Playing Fields Association
25 Ovington Square
London SW3 1LQ
tel 020 7584 6445
www.npfa.co.uk

Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management
ILAM House
Lower Basildon Road
Reading
RG8 9NE
tel 01491 874800
www.ilam.co.uk

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
(RoSPA)
Edgbaston Park
33 Bristol Road
Birmingham B5 7ST
tel 0121 248 2000
www.rospa.com

The statistics used in this factsheet are drawn from a number of sources. The government's Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System that collected information throughout the UK from 1978 was closed down in May 2003. The enquiry service will be maintained for 5 years. Enquiries should be directed to Information Centre, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, Edgbaston Park, 353 Bristol Road, Birmingham B5 7ST, email: infocentre@rospa.com, fax: 0121 248 2001, tel: 0121 248 2066.

Copies of the Annual Reports of the Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System can be downloaded from www.ndad.nationalarchives.gov.uk/CRDA/58/DD/1/detail.html. The reports for 1998 – 2002 inclusive can be downloaded from www.hassandlass.org.uk/query/reports.htm. Visit www.hassandlass.org.uk to interrogate the database for 2000-2002 yourself.

Factsheets with more detailed information on a variety of accident topics can be found on the Child Accident Prevention Trust website, www.capt.org.uk or can be provided by post on receipt of a stamped address envelope and a list of the subjects you require.

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