

PLAYGROUND SAFETY

Inspections & Policies

The Active & Safe Program

The Public Health Agency of Canada has launched the *Active & Safe* injury prevention initiative. The overall goal of this initiative is to reduce sport and recreation related injuries sustained in high participation activities among children and youth (ages 0-19). The initiative focuses on serious injuries such as concussions/brain injuries, drowning and fractures.

This initiative enables community level action on sport and recreation safety awareness through funding projects such as Active and Safe PEI.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Playground Injuries

- 28,500 children aged 0-14 years are treated annually in emergency departments and hospitals for playground-related injuries in Canada.
- Approximately 80% of playground-related injuries result from falls to the surface.
- Only 14.5% involved a fall to an impact absorbing surface such as sand, gravel, rubber, etc.

Data collected from CHIRPP, NEISS, CDC, Canadian Institute of Child Health, and Safe Kids

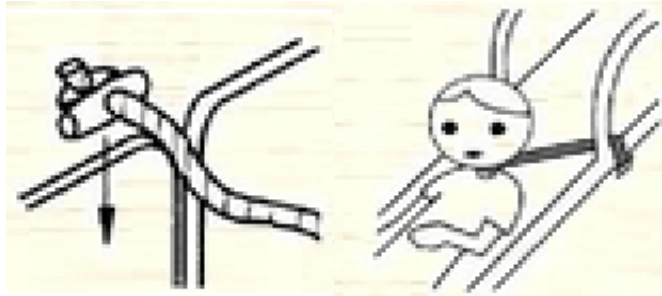
Playground Injuries

18 fatalities on play equipment in Canada from 1982-2002.

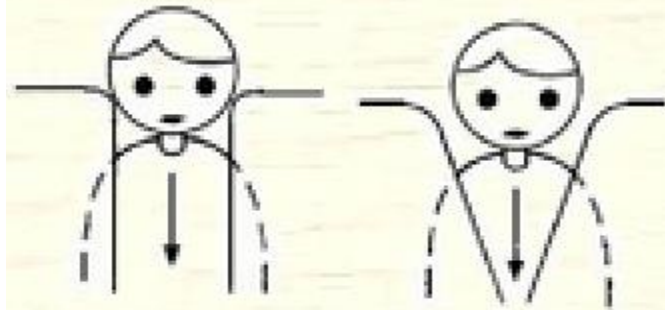
- 17 from entanglement
- 1 from a fall (head fracture)

4 fatalities since 2002

2 entanglement



2 entrapment



Data collected from CHIRPP, NEISS, CDC, Canadian Institute of Child Health, and Safe Kids

Why Have Playgrounds?

- Children's heart rates average 90-105 bpm during normal activity.
- Children's heart rates average 132 bpm during physical education classes.
- Children's heart rates average 150 bpm on playgrounds.

Source: Frost 2004

Children need the unstructured play and risk that a playground provides in order to develop decision making skills, for social interaction, and to develop physically.

Physical Development

18 Months to 5 Years

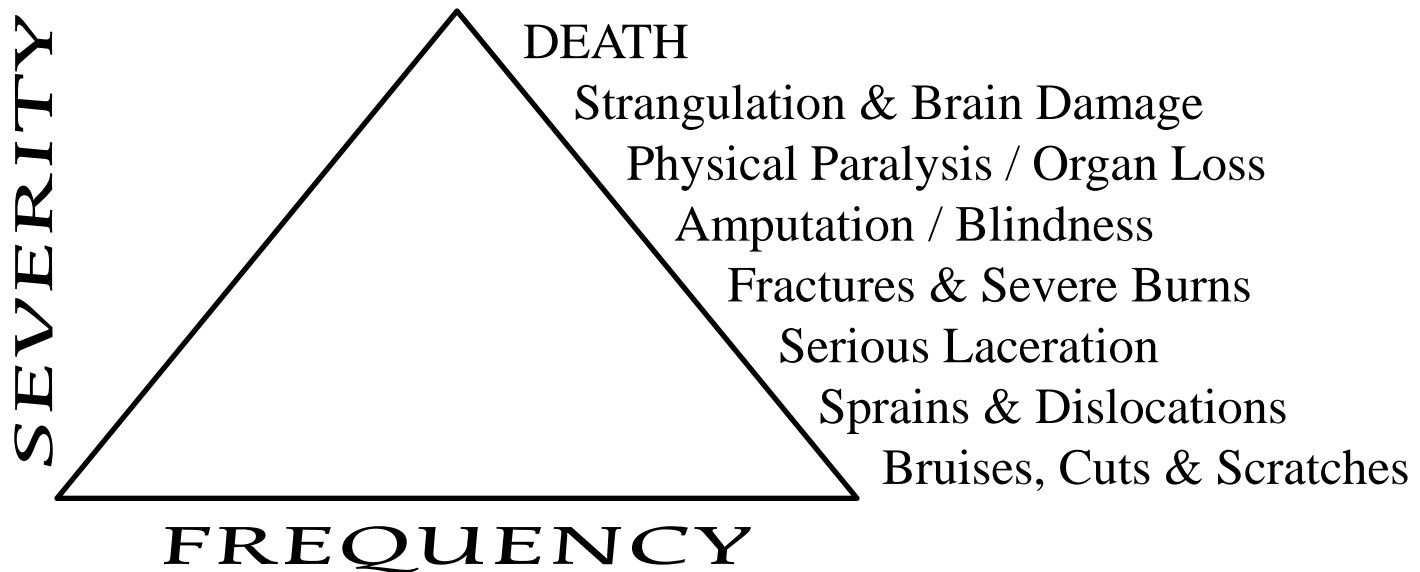
- Improved balance
- Physically more daring
- Ability to run at 36 months
- Coordination allows for pumping on swings
- Climbing and skipping

5 Years to 12 Years

- Greater abilities in running, jumping and balance
- More risk taking
- Use of upper body for climbing
- Physical endurance

Playground Injuries

The Objective...



...not to completely eliminate injuries, but to keep injuries at the lower end of the spectrum.

The CSA Standard

- The standard is **voluntary** and is not designed to force removal or replacement of structures.
- The Standard is **intended to promote the use of playspaces** that are well designed, well maintained, innovative, and challenging.
- Simply... **doing what is reasonable to elevate the level of safety in playgrounds.**

“We need as much play value as we can possibly get, but only as much safety as necessary!”

Julian Richter, chair of European Committee for the Coordination of Standards
(extracted from CSA Z614 resource document)

Risk versus Hazard

- Injuries are an expected result of challenging play equipment
- No injuries = equipment is not challenging to users
- The most important function of a Safety Inspection is to eliminate life-threatening and debilitating hazards
- We want age appropriate risks but we NEVER want hidden hazards

Risk versus Hazard

- Risk – allows user to identify the challenge, evaluate it, and make a decision on how the challenge should be dealt with. Example: user swinging on a swing set for the first time.
- Hazard – the potential injury causing problem cannot be seen, identified, or evaluated by the user; potential for injury is “hidden”. Example: severely worn S-hook on the swing set breaks.

Hazard Classification

A – Life threatening or debilitating injuries

- Entanglement, entrapment, structural failure, protective surfacing violations, etc.



Hazard Classification

B – Serious, non-disabling injuries

- Crush and shear, protrusions, sharp edges, etc.



Hazard Classification

C – May cause minor injuries or equipment not in compliance with most recent version of CSA Z614 Standard

- Equipment compliance needs updating, improper or missing signage, no-encroachment zones, minor injuries may occur, etc.



Life-Threatening Hazards

SURFACING

- The protective surfacing area under and around the outside of all pieces of equipment should comply with CSA Standards.
- Appropriate surfacing depth and width should exist, especially under high use areas such as swings, slides, and sliding poles.

Remember: 80% of all playground injuries are falls to the surface.

ENTRAPMENT

- Fully bound openings that are larger than 3.5 inches (88.9mm) but at the same time smaller than 9 inches (228.6mm) should not exist.
- Partially bound openings (in the shape of a V or U) where a child could get their neck over the top, lose their footing, and not get their head back through should not exist.

Remember: There have been 2 entrapment deaths since 2002.

ENTANGLEMENT

- Swings/chains should have no connecting devices with gaps greater than 1mm.
- Gaps and other openings around slides and sliding poles that would catch a drawstring, scarf, or loose clothing should be eliminated.
- Skipping Ropes and Bicycle Helmets should not be used/worn around playground equipment.

Remember: Since 1982 there have been 19 entanglement deaths.

How Often To Inspect:

In addition to Annual Inspections done by a Canadian Certified Playground Inspector, it is also recommended that Monthly Inspections and Daily/Weekly Inspections be done.

Purpose: Monthly – seasonal issues, intensity of use issues.

Daily/Weekly – remove obvious hazards, evaluate vandalism, and/or broken components.

Reasons To Inspect:

- Lower the number of injuries by eliminating life-threatening and debilitating hazards
(Child Safety should always be top priority!)
- Community pride
- Extend the lifespan of the equipment
- Determine budgeting for new equipment
- Investigate the cause of a previous injury
- Possibly protect against future lawsuits

LAWSUITS!?

The owner/operator of any public access space could potentially be sued if someone is injured.

Occupiers Liability Act states that the occupier of the property has a duty not to have a dangerous situation existing on that property.

No law requires following CSA Standards. They do not establish a benchmark for what is dangerous/hazardous, but they do establish a 'minimum standard of care'.

Playground Policies

Having a Playground Safety Policy shows;

- **How often you inspect your playgrounds.**
- What Standards you use for inspections (CSA).
- That you are organized and professional.
- That you care about the wellbeing of the children that use your equipment.

In legal matters, your Playground Safety Policy along with Inspections kept on file could prove you're doing your 'minimum standard of care'.

Things Owners/Operators Can Do

- Do Nothing (not enough)
- Tear down equipment (too much)
- Close the playground (too much)

OR...

- Schedule a FREE CSA Inspection
- Start regularly scheduled inspections
- Find/Remove Life Threatening Hazards
- Adopt a Playground Safety Policy

Active & Safe PEI

Contact us with any questions, concerns, comments,
to schedule a Playground Inspection,
or to help develop a Playground Safety Policy.

Recreation PEI

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Thank you for your time!