

Injury Issues & Topics of Interest: Playground Injury Prevention

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that 205,860 children receive emergency department care for injuries that occurred on playground equipment. Seventy-six percent of these injuries happen on playground equipment in schools, daycare facilities and parks. Twenty-three percent of injuries occur on playground equipment designed for home use. One percent of injuries happen on homemade playground equipment, primarily rope swings.

The majority of these injuries involve equipment at schools (45%) and public parks (31%). Injuries also occur on playgrounds at daycare centers, apartment complexes, and fast food restaurants.

From January, 1990 or August, 2000, CPSC received reports of 147 deaths on playgrounds. Injuries to the head and face accounted for 49% of the injuries to children up to 4 years of age. Children ages 5-14 suffered 49% of injuries to the arm and hand. Approximately 15% of these injuries were classified as severe with 3% requiring hospitalization. The most prevalent diagnoses were fractures (39%), lacerations (22%), contusions/abrasions (20%), and strains/sprains (11%).

Falls to the surface was a contributing factor in 79% of all injuries. This problem is exacerbated by inappropriate surfacing such as asphalt, dirt or grass and/or inadequate maintenance and depth of loose-fill surfacing. Children fall because they slip, lose their grip, or lose their balance while playing on climbing equipment, swings, slides, and seesaws. They can be hurt by the fall or by striking equipment as they fall.

In terms of equipment, 53% of children were injured on climbing equipment, 19% of children were injured on swings, and 17% were injured on slides. In addition to issues with adequate playground surfacing, many public playgrounds are not properly maintained and contain broken and/or missing equipment and hardware.

The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons estimates that 527,000 children were treated in hospitals, doctors' offices/clinics ambulatory surgery centers and hospital emergency departments for injuries related to playground equipment in 1999. In 2000, the cost of most of the injuries was estimated at \$11.3 billion.