Playgrounds

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

How may a child be injured?

Cuts and bruises
- Cuts and bruises may occur when children fall from a piece of equipment or are injured by other children using the play equipment.
- Protruding parts and sharp edges on playground equipment can also cause cuts and bruises.

Entrapment
- Some playgrounds have openings that children may get trapped in. Guardrails or ladder rungs that provide access to spaces may cause children to get their head, body or limbs trapped.

Falls
- Many pieces of playground equipment are located above 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 thereby 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 and monkey bars.

How common are these injuries?
In Australia, the most common type of fall for children (aged 0-14 years) was one that involved playground equipment, accounting for 44,243 hospital admissions between 1999/00 and 2006/07.1

In Victoria, there were 4,472 hospital admissions for play equipment fall injuries over the 3 year period from 2010/11 to 2012/13. The majority of these injuries involved play equipment in public playgrounds.2

Is there a Law or an Australian Standard for playgrounds?
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.

It is recommended that when manufacturing and/or installing playground equipment compliance with the following Australian Standards is applied:
-AS 4685 Parts 1-6&11: 2014 Playground equipment and surfacing
-AS/NZ 4486.1: 1997 Playground and playground equipment
-AS/NZ 4422: 1996 Playground surfacing
-AS/NZ 4422-1996/Amdt 1-1999 Playground surfacing
-AS 1428 Design for Access and Mobility

These Australian Standards are voluntary standards that manufacturers are not required to meet, however, The Children's Hospital at Westmead suggests that you purchase and use playground equipment that meets these standards.

If you choose to purchase or use playground equipment, please consider the safety recommendations below.

- Height of equipment should be minimised so that if a child does fall, the impact will be lessened. The maximum fall height recommended is 3m.
- For all equipment exceeding 600mm in height, ensure there is soft material underneath the play equipment that extends 2.5m around the equipment. This soft surface needs to be 300mm 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.
- 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 or other hazards.
- Ensure that the equipment is stable and well anchored before allowing children to play.
(Refer to the Australian Standards for all recommendations.)

References

Remember:

- Purchase and use playground equipment that meets the above Australian Standards.
- Check second hand goods for wear and tear prior to buying or borrowing an item for use with your child.
- Always remember, at a playground:
  - it is very important to supervise children.
  - children under your care should only play on age-appropriate equipment.
  - to make sure children have appropriate sun protection.
  - to make sure children are wearing appropriate clothing and footwear.
- Check for products that have been recalled (www.recalls.gov.au) prior to buying or borrowing an item for use with your child.

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