

# FACTS ON... *Playground Safety*

*A guide  
for those who  
work with  
families*



Playgrounds are a great place for children to have fun while getting physical exercise. It is important to help your child play safe, and be aware of any potential playground safety hazards. It is estimated that more than 28,500 Canadian children are treated for playground-related injuries each year. Playground injuries are the second leading cause of hospitalization for children aged 5 – 9 years, with falls being the number one cause of playground injuries.

This chart was designed to aid professionals while teaching families how to be S.A.F.E. on playgrounds. **S.A.F.E** stands for **Supervision. Age Appropriate. Fall Surfacing. Equipment.**

Many of the recommendations are based on the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Standard, “Children’s Play Spaces and Equipment”.



## **Supervision**

It is important for parents and caregivers to pay close attention to the play environment – this includes the ground covering, play equipment and the activities of the children.

- Parents or guardians should be actively supervising children while on the playground. Active supervision is being alert and watching at a close enough distance to take action if needed.
- Encourage children to always use the stairs when climbing onto any play equipment.
- Children should not be wearing anything that could become a choking hazard on the play equipment (e.g. scarves, drawstrings, and helmets).
- Only one person on a slide at a time.
- Children should be discouraged from jumping off a swing while it is still moving and climbing up slides.

## **Age Appropriate**

Reduce the risk of injury by making sure playground equipment is not too high or too large for the child.

- The CSA requires an age-appropriate label on equipment in public playgrounds. The CSA label is not always in plain sight, it is usually found on or under a piece of play equipment. Check for this label on equipment before allowing a child to play.
- Children under 5 years of age should play on equipment under 1.5 m (5 ft).
- If a child cannot reach the play equipment on their own, it is probably too big for them.



For more information on children’s injury prevention topics, visit [www.childsafetylink.ca](http://www.childsafetylink.ca) or call 1-866-288-1388 (toll-free in the Maritimes)



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## Fall Surfacing

Falls are the number one cause of playground-related injuries. Proper surfacing can reduce serious injury in the event of a fall.

### Recommended Playground Surfacing

Soft Sand      Pea Gravel  
Wood Chips    Rubber Material

### Not Recommended Playground Surfacing

Grass      Hard-Packed Dirt  
Sharp Rocks    Pavement

- Grass is not considered safe surfacing because it does not cushion falls as well as other materials (e.g. soft sand, wood chips, pea gravel, and rubber material).
- The higher the equipment is from the ground, the deeper the surfacing should be.
- Playground surfacing should cover at least 1.8 m (6 ft) in all directions from the play equipment.
- Check for sharp or dangerous objects that may become hidden in the surfacing.

## Equipment

Make sure a playground is safe before allowing a child to play on it.

It is important to report unsafe conditions to the owner of the playground. Public playgrounds are often owned by school boards or municipalities.

The CSA playground standard requires public playgrounds to have a sign posted providing the contact information for the owner of the playground.

- The CSA recommends at least 1.8 (6 ft) of space around most pieces of equipment.
- Extra space is required at the bottom of slides and around swings.
- Make sure a child's head cannot get trapped in the spaces of the equipment itself – all spaces should be smaller than 9 cm (3.5 in) and larger than 23 cm (9 in).
- Platform structures should have ramps and guardrails to prevent falls.
- Watch for sharp points or edges on equipment that could catch on clothing.
- Do not attach clotheslines, skipping ropes or pet leashes to play equipment; these items could be a tripping or choking hazard.
- Be mindful of how weather could affect play equipment; rain can make some play equipment slippery and heat from the sun can make certain playground equipment very hot to touch. Encourage children to play in other areas of the playground if the equipment is slippery or too hot.
- Sandboxes should be located off to the side of any playground equipment; a minimum sand depth of 2 cm (0.79 in) is recommended; a good sand depth is 4.5 cm (1.77 in).



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