

Playground Safety & Broken Bones

Most parents or caregivers may not think of a playground as being a dangerous place for their children. However, every year in the United States there are 200,000 cases of emergency room visits due to accidents that occur on playground equipment. The majority of these injuries are due to falls.

“Playground injuries range from scrapes and bruises to fractures, dislocations and concussions. We often begin to see more fractures of the forearm and around the elbow as the weather improves and more children are playing outside,” says Karen Bovid, MD, assistant professor in the department of orthopaedic surgery at Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine, who serves as the pediatric orthopaedic surgeon for Bronson Children’s Hospital.

Below is some advice from Dr. Bovid and Safe Kids Worldwide:

Make sure surfaces are safe –

- Avoid playgrounds with non-impact absorbing surfaces, such as asphalt, concrete, glass, dirt or gravel.
- Recommended surface materials include: sand, pea gravel, wood chips, mulch and shredded rubber.
- Surfacing should be at least 12 inches deep and extend at least 6 feet in all directions around stationary equipment. Depending on the height of the equipment, surfacing may need to extend farther than 6 feet.
- For swings, make sure that the surfacing extends, in the back and front, twice the height of the suspending bar. So if the top of the swing set is 10 feet high, the surfacing should extend 20 feet.
- Equipment should be dry to avoid slipping. Use caution as metal equipment can become very hot in direct sunlight.



“Encourage your kids to have fun safely outside and at the playground,” says Bovid. “Active play is a great way to build muscles, social relationships, and healthy habits for the future. Choose age appropriate activities and supervise your children while they play.”

Be cautious – “Avoid taking toddlers down the slide on an adult’s lap,” Bovid warns. “Tibia (shinbone) fractures frequently occur when the child’s foot gets caught or twisted during the ride.”

Dress smart – Steer clear of loose clothing, scarves, necklaces and drawstrings. This apparel can easily get snagged on playground equipment, which can cause trips and falls. It’s also a choking and strangulation hazard. Choose supportive shoes that will stay on and protect your child’s feet.

Set ground rules – Falls are the most common type of playground injury. Because of this, pushing, shoving or any type of physical contact can be dangerous when playing on playground equipment. Remind your child to be courteous and cautious.

Source: Safe Kids Worldwide. For more information visit www.safekids.org.

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