

Playground safety of kids' clothes to be examined in wake of 4 deaths; [AM Edition]

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The consumer affairs ministry will study how to make children's clothing safer following the deaths of four children in Canada last year.

The four youngsters, including a 4-year-old Mississauga boy, accidentally strangled when drawstrings on their winter coats became tangled on either fences or playground equipment.

"We've expressed our concerns to the various clothing manufacturer associations and asked them for their input," said Helene Paradis, spokesperson for the federal ministry's product safety branch.

"It's a high priority project for us."

The study, which begins April 1 and may last a year, will also look into how playground equipment can be made safer in relation children's clothing.

Last month, a coroner's inquest into the death of a 6-year-old Sudbury girl urged the ministry to prohibit manufacturers from putting drawstrings on children's clothing and to undertake a public awareness campaign warning people about the potential dangers they pose for children.

Kayla Kutschke, 6, choked to death Oct. 1, 1992, when the drawstring on her coat became snagged in a gap on a slide at a Sudbury playground.

"We could ask the clothing manufacturers to voluntarily remove the drawstrings but it's not only the drawstrings that could cause a problem," Paradis said. "The buttons, the sleeves, loose clothing, all pose a potential problem."

Three other known victims in Canada in 1992 are:

* Jesse Bettencourt of Credit Woodlands Court in Mississauga, who died Dec. 5, two days after he was found hanging from the top of a backyard fence adjacent to a playground in the Springfield Co- Operative Housing complex. The drawstring of his parka became wedged at the top of a wooden fence he was climbing adjacent to the playground.

* A 10-year-old Montreal boy who strangled last February when the drawstring on his hood became tangled in a swing in his backyard.

* A 2 1/2-year-old Edmonton girl who died when a drawstring on her clothing became caught.