

## **See related story by Brown on page B1 Soft surface can prevent injuries; [AM Edition]**

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TORONTO STAR

May 18, 1993 Sec. C. pg. B.1

### Note

Never assume a playground is safe. That's the warning from the Canadian Standards Association, which publishes voluntary safety guidelines for Canada's play equipment.

But as a parent, how can you tell where danger lies at your local playground?

The Children's Health Foundation of northern Alberta made up a handy checklist for parents based on the CSA's exhaustive guidelines, after the tragic death of a child at an Edmonton playground.

Here is the checklist:

**SURFACE:** A safe surface is the most important thing to look for. A child can suffer a fatal skull fracture just by falling 50 centimetres (20 inches) on to concrete or 75 centimetres (30 inches) on to hard-packed ground.

Look for dry, loose wood chips, wood mulch, pea gravel or sand. These allow more "give" to a falling child than does hard earth or concrete. It should be 24 to 30 centimetres (9 to 12 inches) deep, and it should extend a minimum of 1.8 metres (6 feet) in all directions around the play equipment. For swings, the safe surface should reach at least twice as far as the height of the swing.

The City of Toronto prefers sand to pea gravel or wood chips, because it can be sifted regularly to separate glass, garbage or even needles.

**ELBOW ROOM:** Pieces of equipment should be located at least 1.8 metres from each other - far enough that children won't land on one piece of equipment if they fall off another. And if one of the pieces moves - like those merry-go-round platforms, for example - then the distance should be at least 3.6 metres.

**HEIGHT:** While CSA guidelines do not specify a maximum height limit for play structures, guidelines in the United States suggest platforms for slides and climbing structures should be no higher than 2 metres off the ground for preschoolers or 2.1 metres (about 7 feet) for older children.

**HANDRAILS:** Guardrails should be on all equipment or elevated platforms, walkways or ramps over 45 centimetres (18 inches) high. Platforms higher than that must have vertical guard railings. There should also be handrails on all stairs, ladders or ramps.

**HEAD TRAPS:** If an opening is too small, a child may get his head trapped. Check that openings designed for preschoolers - whether between rungs of a ladder or holes in the structure - are not between 7 and 25 centimetres (3 to 10 inches) - the perfect size for a head to fit. Similarly, for equipment older children are using, make sure the head space is not between 7 and 30 centimetres (3 to 12 inches).

**DANGER HOOKS:** Check for anything that can act as a hook to snag clothing, especially at the top of slides.

**SHARP EDGES:** Look for dangerous sharp points, nuts, bolts or other projecting parts that can cut your child.

**PINCHING:** Check for exposed moving parts that can pinch or crunch parts of your child's body - especially fingers.

**CONDITION:** Has the equipment been maintained? Is the wood rotting or showing loose splinters? Is the plastic cracked? Is the metal rusted? Paint chipped? Is the equipment strongly anchored to the ground?

**ACCESS:** Is the playground enclosed or separated from traffic? Is speed on adjacent streets controlled? Are there safe crossings for children?

**RULES FOR YOUR KIDS:**

- \* Make sure your children are not using equipment beyond their ability.
- \* Stop kids from trying anything dangerous. A child in Mississauga died last year while using a skipping rope hanging from a jungle gym to pull himself up a slide. The rope formed a noose around his neck and strangled him.
- \* Teach children the rules of safe play - No pushing. No walking in front of swings or other moving equipment. Keep fingers away from moving parts. Equipment is slippery when wet. Always hold handrails. Never jump from unsafe heights. Don't run up or down slides. Don't help younger children climb to unsafe heights.

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