

— Guide to — Playground Hazards

Whether in full swing — literally — or climbing toward the clouds, children seem to love playing at the park. Sometimes, however, there is peril on the playground: More than 200,000 children per year go to the emergency room after a playground incident.

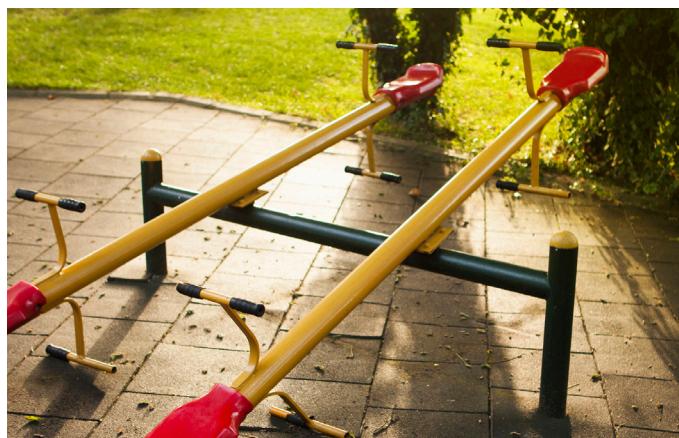
Falls and equipment-related hazards (such as broken equipment, poor design, etc.) were to blame for 67 percent of the incidents. Many injuries easily could be prevented if proper playground set precautions had been taken. Here's a look at some of the most prevalent hazards to look for to keep children safe, followed by a playground safety checklist.

.....Playground Hazards.....

CRUSH POINTS

Any equipment with a moving part and some weight behind it could be a crush point. Look for whether it is possible for a child to expose a body part to a moving object.

Example: A seesaw.



SHEARING POINTS

Like a crush point, a shear point would be where an object with a sharp edge and force involved could shear a finger or even a limb. Look for sharp edges on anything that can move or that a child can run into.

Example: Sharp edges on the undercarriage of a merry-go-round.

ENTANGLEMENT

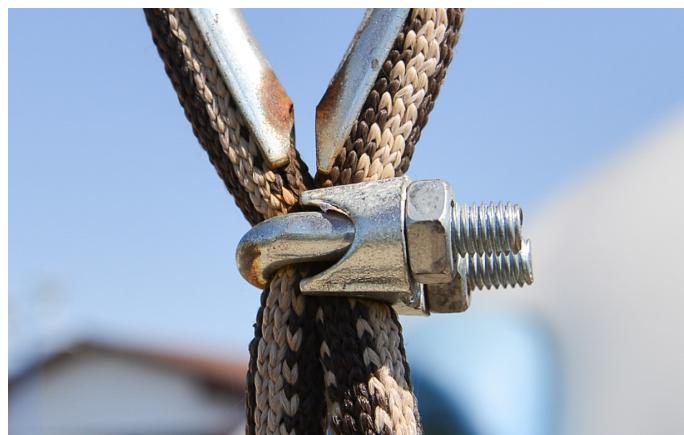
Anything that a child's clothing (or jewelry or drawstring) could get tangled on is a hazard, the consequences of which could include strangulation. Look for protruding hooks, bolts, screws or other hardware, and gaps between a slide platform and chute where the ball on a hoodie drawstring could get caught.

Examples: All equipment, but particularly slides or rope-climbing equipment.

IMPALEMENT

Anything that projects outward from playground equipment (a bolt, hook or screw, for instance) is an impalement hazard. Look for bolts that extend past a nut by more than two threads, hooks that are not closed, or poles that are not protected with a rounded cap.

Examples: All equipment.



ENTRAPMENT

Curiosity coaxes kids into poking their heads through openings, and toddlers may not have the motor skills or the sensibilities — particularly if they panic — to back out. Look at the gaps between rails, rungs and any kind of netting.

Examples: Ladder rungs, a bridge, a landing.



USED TIRES

Exposed wire from recycled steel-belted tires could puncture or cut the skin. Look for protruding pieces of metal.

Examples: Tire swings, tire obstacle course, rubber mulch.

CUTTING EDGES AND SHARP POINTS

Lacerations, punctures and stitches are the price to pay for coming into contact with sharp edges or points. Look at the edges of all playground equipment, including any wood that may be splintering.

Examples: All equipment.

BURNS

Playground equipment can get hot on a sunny day.

Examples: All equipment, especially metal slides.

SUSPENDED HAZARDS

A rope, rail or wire that hangs or sags less than 7 feet above the ground can be run into, or tripped over if it's low enough. Look for these especially in high-traffic areas.

Examples: Netting, suspension bridges, ramps.

TRIPPING HAZARDS

Soft landings are not guaranteed, despite the safer surfaces used today. Look for sudden changes in elevation, such as where there are obscure equipment footings, or at the edge of the playground where mulch meets the sidewalk or a walking path.

Examples: All equipment.

FALLS

A nice summer day can quickly turn into a bad fall day. Check rails where equipment lures kids off the ground, and mulch/wood chip levels under swings and ladders for maximum protection.

Examples: Swings, slides, climbing equipment.



Playground Maintenance / Inspection Checklist



CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO DO AND LOOK FOR TO MAXIMIZE PLAYGROUND SAFETY:

- Protective surface (rubber mulch or mats, sand, wood chips, etc.) is adequate in terms of both quantity and quality (not deteriorated or compacted), and also is free of foreign objects
- Playground drainage is sufficient to prevent standing water
- Inspect and eliminate or cover any sharp points, corners or edges on all equipment, especially the edges and ends of slides
- Replace any missing or damaged protective caps or plugs
- Make sure paint isn't peeling or chipping
- Test entrapment spaces — openings should be less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches to prevent a child from getting his or her head stuck
- Check for hazardous protrusions, such as bolts and hooks
- Check for entanglement hazards
- Check for crush points
- Check for shearing points
- Eliminate tripping hazards, including equipment footings that are exposed, rocks, tree roots, etc.
- Check for damaged/rusting/rotting/splintering equipment that reduces structure's integrity
- Check that all equipment is securely anchored, with no loose connections or missing rails, rungs or steps
- Check for worn-out parts on moving equipment, including merry-go-rounds, swings and track rides
- Clear the playground of all debris
- Ensure that protective surfacing covers an area at least 6 feet in every direction from equipment — and for twice the height of the suspending bar for swings, in both the front and back



This playground safety checklist is presented by
Grounds For Play.