Preventing playground injuries

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ABSTRACT

With concerns increasing around childhood obesity and inactivity, playgrounds offer a chance for children to be active. But playgrounds also have risks, with injuries from falls being the most common. Research has shown that playground injuries can be reduced by lowering the heights of play equipment and using soft, deep surfaces to cushion falls. The Canadian Standards Association has published voluntary standards for playgrounds to address these risks for several years. Parents can further reduce injury risks by following simple playground strategies. This statement outlines the burden of playground injuries. It also provides parents and health care providers with opportunities to reduce injury incidence and severity through education and advocacy, and to implement evidence-informed safety standards and safer play strategies in local playgrounds. This document replaces a previous Canadian Paediatric Society position statement published in 2002.

Key Words: *Equipment; Falls; Injury; Playground, Play space, Standards; Surfacing*

RECOMMENDATIONS

To protect children from the most common playground injuries, the Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that:

Health care providers:

- Offer anticipatory guidance about playground injuries and what parents can do to reduce children's risk. SafeKids Canada <www.safekidscanada.ca> and the Canadian Paediatric Society <www.caringforkids.cps.ca> have evidence-based information and resources on making playgrounds safer, for families, child care providers and communities.
- Report playground injuries to local playground operators and authorities.
- Educate playground operators about injury prevention by being involved with municipal planning and public health initiatives. A participating physician or health care professional can bring credibility to safety issues and provide specific details about the nature and risk of playground injuries.
- Advocate that new and existing playgrounds in the community be designed or upgraded to meet current Canadian Standards Association (CSA) guidelines. To obtain a copy of Children's Playspaces and Equipment, visit www.csa.ca.

Policy makers:

- Ensure that municipal policies on playground development and maintenance focus on compliance with CSA standards and reflect evidence-informed strategies to reduce playground-related injuries in children. To obtain a copy of Children's Playspaces and Equipment, visit www.csa.ca.

Parents and caregivers:

- Provide active supervision.
- Teach and model playground safety rules, and remind children how to use equipment safely.
- Check local playground equipment and surfacing regularly, reporting problems to operators.
- Dress children in a neck warmer instead of a scarf in cold weather, and avoid clothing with drawstrings or cords. These items can catch on playground equipment and cause strangulation.
- Remove a child's helmet before permitting access to play equipment.
- Build home playgrounds to meet the CSA standards. To obtain a copy of Children's Playspaces and Equipment, visit www.csa.ca.

NOTE: For parent information, visit www.caringforkids.cps.ca

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The recommendations in this statement do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or procedure to be followed. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate. All Canadian Paediatric Society position statements and practice points are reviewed on a regular basis. Please consult the Position Statements section of the CPS website (www.cps.ca) for the full-text, current version.

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