

Most playground injuries can be prevented or their severity reduced by good planning, design and maintenance to avoid playground hazards.

It is important to note that the Australian Standards for playgrounds recognise that children need opportunities to experience risk and challenge in playgrounds and the standards focus on the elimination of hazards likely to cause serious life threatening injuries. The standards do not advocate risk-free playgrounds.

Free Height of Fall

Free height of fall refers to the distance between any platforms or hanging points on a playground item and the ground below. Risk or serious injury is minimized where fall heights are reduced.

The Australian Standards recommend a maximum free height of fall of 1800mm for Supervised Early Childhood Settings and 3000mm in all other public or education settings.

Impact Area

The impact area is the area beneath and around playground equipment where a child might land if they fall. The Australian Standards specify the dimensions for impact areas dependent upon the height of the equipment and its use. For example, equipment that involves movement requires more space.



Surfacing

For any equipment that has a free height of fall more than 600mm, Australian Standards recommend that the surfacing must meet certain minimum impact attenuating requirements, AS 4422. There are two main types of materials that comply:

Loose-fill: suitable sand or barkchip, that drains well, is regularly checked, and raked/aerated to avoid compaction and replenished to maintain a required minimum depth. The Australian standards requires loose fill surfacing be installed to a minimum depth of 300mm and maintained at a minimum depth of 200m.

Unitary Surfacing (Synthetic/rubber): wet pour rubber or synthetic grass can also be used. Surfaces should be free of trip and slip hazards and checked periodically to ensure there is no deterioration (e.g. sub surface bumps or dips). At the time of installation you should also ask for a certificate of compliance to the relevant Australian Standard (AS4422). As a minimum regular testing of unitary surfacing should be undertaken before opening the playground and at least every three years.

Entrapment and Pinch Points

There must be no gaps in which a child could become trapped, especially by the head, neck or chest. Gaps that might trap limbs, hands, fingers, hair and clothing should also be avoided.

Ensure there are no moving parts that might create crush or pinch points and that any timber is well maintained to avoid splits and splinters.

Age Appropriate Activities

Children of different ages (or the same age) can have very different physical skills. It is important to ensure your playground includes graduated levels of risk and challenge or that you provide different playground activities for younger and older children.



Guardrails and Barriers

Guardrails and barriers are installed on play elements to protect children from falls. For more information see Kidsafe SA factsheet on Barriers, Guardrails and Handrails.

Space and Flow of Play

Playgrounds typically involve lots of movement. Allow sufficient space for children to move freely about the playground and use the equipment safely. Another important point to consider is any potential clash between active and passive play pursuits. A good design and layout will ensure the flow of children moving through the space matches the different activities children might be participating in.

Trip Hazards

Keep paths and walkways even and clear of tree roots, stumps or rocks unless these are used to provide a balance activity and embedded within an appropriate space.

Avoid any edging or curbing that might create a trip hazard and ensure all concrete footings are well below the ground and any surfacing material.

Protrusions and Catch Points

Playground equipment should not contain any bolts, nails, screws or other elements that might cut, pierce or bruise; or act as a hook to entangle children's clothing or hair. Similarly, ensure any ropes are secured top and bottom so they cannot form a loop or noose.

Maintenance

It is important that a regime of regular maintenance checks and annual comprehensive audit inspections is maintained. Similarly, it is important to keep accurate records of these checks and inspections and any repairs or modifications undertaken.

Supervision

We encourage adult supervision that is appropriate for the age of the children and the activity they are participating in. Young children in particular need closer supervision and guidance.

A great way to encourage supervision at your playground is by ensuring it is adult friendly. This means providing amenities such as shade, seating, water, toilets, safe access/pathways to or parking at the playground.

Another strategy is to maintain clear lines of sight, so adults can maintain discrete supervision where appropriate.

Equipment not Recommended

Plank swings, boat swings, roundabouts (except those with speed limiting devices) maypoles, are extremely hazardous because of their design, and all have the potential to cause death or serious injury. Kidsafe SA recommends that if any of these items are present in your playground they should be immediately removed.

CONTACT KIDSAFE SA

Phone: (08) 7089 8554

Email: play@kidsafesa.com.au

Need more help? Kidsafe SA provides a playground inspection service. Contact us for a quote to organise an inspector to visit your playspace and provide specific advice.