

RISK SIMPLIFIED

RESOURCES:
[Playground Safety Handbook](#)

QUESTIONS:
[Email PRISM Risk Control](#)
or call 916.850.7300

Identifying Playground Hazards

by Eric Lucero

Before students return to school, inspect your sites for the leading causes of severe injuries involving playground equipment. A common item of concern is the surfacing used throughout the facility, particularly in specific use zones.

Protective Surfacing

According to the National Playground Safety Institute, improper or inadequate surfacing material is the leading cause of playground-related injuries. Over 79% of all injuries on playgrounds result from children falling off playground equipment. As such, the Consumer Product Safety Commission requires the surface or ground under and around playground equipment to be soft enough to cushion a fall to prevent debilitating head and neck injuries. Protective surfacing generally falls under one of two categories: unitized or loose-fill.

Loose-fill surfacing, such as wood chips or engineered wood fiber, can be cost effective, but must be maintained at a minimum depth of 12 inches when fluffed and not less than 9 inches when compressed. Equipment posts may be marked with minimum fill levels to facilitate easier inspection.

Use Zones

A use zone is an area under and around playground equipment where a child could fall. Use zones must be covered with protective surfacing material and extend a minimum of six feet in all directions from the edge of stationary play equipment such as climbers and chin-up bars. Areas with slides and swings require larger use zones with protective surfacing.



Slide Use Zone

- For slides six feet or less in height, the use zone at the bottom of the exit area should extend a minimum of six feet from the end of the slide.
- For slides between six feet and eight feet high, the use zone at the exit of the slide is equal to the height of the platform or entrance to the slide.
- The maximum exit use zone, regardless of height, is eight feet.



Other Hazards

A comprehensive playground inspection program will extend beyond playground surfacing. Other hazards to inspect for include, but are not limited to:

- Equipment location - Play structures more than 30 inches high must be spaced at least 9 feet apart.
- Cleanliness - Inspect loose-fill for feces and sharp objects such as broken glass, debris, and needles.
- Check for dangerous hardware, such as open "S" hooks or protruding bolt ends.
- Entrapment Hazards - Make sure spaces that could trap children, such as openings in guardrails or between ladder rungs, measure less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches.
- Check for sharp points or edges in equipment.
- Inspect for tripping hazards including exposed concrete footings, tree stumps, and rocks.
- Fall Protection - Make sure elevated surfaces, like platforms and ramps, have guardrails to prevent falls.
- Pests - Check for insect damage and rusted or corroded metals.

These tips will help ensure your playground is in a safe condition as we begin a new school year. For additional details or assistance, please contact [Risk Control](#).

School-Age Belt Swing Use Zone

- Swings require a much greater area for the use zone.
- The use zone should extend two times the height of the pivot or swing hanger in front of, and behind the swing's seats.
- The use zone should also extend six feet to the side of the support structure.

Tot Swing Use Zone

- A fully enclosed tot swing requires less of a use zone than school-age swings.
- Measure the vertical distance from the bottom of the seat to the pivot point or swing hanger and multiply by two for the use zone in front and back of the swings.