

PLAYGROUND INJURIES

Facts About Playground Injuries in Utah Elementary Schools

- ❖ Playground injuries are the most common school-related injuries in grades K-6.
- ❖ 27% of reportable* injuries among elementary students occur on the playground.
- ❖ Each year an average of 940 Utah children in grades K-6 are injured on the school playground.¹



UTAH SCHOOL INJURY REPORT DATA (School years 1999-2000 to 2003-2004) GRADES K-6

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

WHAT

- 4,703 elementary students injured.
- 5,043 missed days of school.
- 270 calls made to 9-1-1.
- 74 hospitalizations.



WHO

- Males sustained 55% of playground injuries.
- More playground injuries occurred during 1st grade (23%) than any other grade.

WHEN

- The majority of playground injuries (88%) occurred during recess and lunch recess.
- Nearly one-third (32%) of playground injuries occurred during September and October.

WHERE

- The most common body areas injured were: arm (29%), hand/wrist (16%), and head (10%).
- The most common types of playground injuries were: possible fracture/broken bone (54%), cut/laceration (17%), and bump/bruise/contusion (9%).



WHY

- Most (75%) playground injuries are due to falls.¹

PREVENTION TIPS

Rules

- Establish and enforce rules for safe use of playground equipment.
- Do not allow flips off swings, slides, or bars.
- Students should use equipment properly: slide feet first, don't climb outside guardrails, no standing on swings, etc.
- Students should not play on wet, icy, or damaged playground equipment.

Maintenance and Inspection

- Check playgrounds regularly to see that equipment is in good condition.
- Provide appropriate protective surfacing underneath and around all equipment. Check surfacing weekly.
- Inspect the playground area daily for glass and litter.
- Develop and follow a written schedule for regular inspections and maintenance. Promptly repair broken equipment.
- Find and correct tripping hazards, protruding hardware, sharp edges, open 'S' hooks, etc.
- Eliminate any exposed moving parts that create potential pinching or crushing hazards.

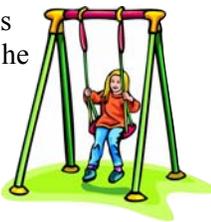
Supervision

- Provide adequate supervision by trained staff whenever students are playing outside.
- Teach students about the proper use of playground equipment and proper play on the playground at least once each year.

PLAYGROUND INJURY EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE 1: A kindergartner was swinging during recess and jumped out of the swing. He fractured his wrist when he landed on the dirt. The wood chips had all been displaced from the swing area.

PREVENTION: Ensure that appropriate surface materials are present under and around playground equipment. Maintain surfacing weekly.



EXAMPLE 2: A 5th grader was sliding down the fire pole head first during lunch recess. He fell and fractured his arm.

EXAMPLE 3: A kindergartner was jumping from one piece of playground equipment to another before school. He fell and fractured his wrist, was hospitalized for 10 days, and required numerous surgeries. Later in the year, he was offering a soda to anyone who could do the same trick.

PREVENTION: Teach and enforce proper safety rules for using playground equipment. Establish consequences for rule-breaking. Supervise and be aware of what students are doing at all times.

EXAMPLE 4: A 2nd grader was swinging during lunch recess and attempted to do a back flip out of the swing. He fractured both arms on the landing and missed over a month of school.

EXAMPLE 5: A 5th grader was hanging upside down from a bar by her knees when she tried to flip onto the ground and land standing up. She fractured her leg and missed 9 days of school.

PREVENTION: Do not allow flips off swings, slides, or bars. Establish and enforce rules for safe use of playground equipment.

EXAMPLE 6: A 3rd grader was swinging during lunch recess when the swing broke. He fell, landed on his head, and was hospitalized for 2 days with a brain injury.

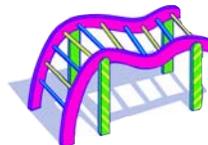
PREVENTION: Develop and follow a written schedule for regular inspections and maintenance. Promptly repair broken equipment.

EXAMPLE 7: A 1st grader was swinging with his backpack on before school. He jumped out and his backpack caught on the swing. He fell on his elbow and received 5 stitches to close the wound.

PREVENTION: Bikes, backpacks, and bags should not be allowed in the playground area.

EXAMPLE 8: A 1st grader was trying to bungee jump from the monkey bars using a jump rope tied around her waist. She scraped her stomach and had to be rescued by the playground supervisor.

PREVENTION: Any kind of rope attached to play equipment poses a strangulation hazard. Never let students tie jump ropes or leashes onto the equipment.



SUPERVISION GUIDELINES FOR PLAYGROUNDS

More than 40% of playground injuries are related to inadequate supervision.² Schools should create a playground supervision plan. The following steps can help:

1. Research policy information. Determine what policies may already be in place.

2. Determine the ratio of children to adults. There is no magic number for the ratio, but some suggest that it should be the same as for an indoor classroom.

3. Provide training. Adults should be trained annually to supervise the playground setting—both children and equipment. Training topics include:

- **Inspection.** Check daily to see that equipment is not broken, the ground cover under the equipment is in place, and the playground is free of debris.
- **Training children to use equipment.** Children should be shown how to use the equipment properly.
- **Rules.** Rules should be minimal so that everyone can remember and follow them. Children should help establish the rules.
- **Consistency of rule enforcement.** All supervisors should enforce the rules.

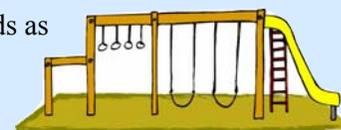
4. Establish procedures to use when a child is injured. Train supervisors in first aid. Complete a Student Injury Report form.

5. Develop risk management policies. Establish an up-to-date file system of injury reports and playground maintenance problems and repairs.

6. Write a detailed supervision plan with policies outlined and distribute to all supervisors and other school personnel.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTIVE SURFACING

Hard surfaces including concrete, asphalt, grass, and dirt are not recommended for playgrounds as they do not absorb shock well during a fall. Appropriate surface materials include: Double-shredded bark mulch, wood chips, fine sand, and pea gravel. School staff must inspect and maintain fall surfaces to loosen packed material and maintain adequate depth.



*All reportable injuries meet the following criteria: Any injury that is severe enough to cause the loss of one-half day or more of school or warrants medical attention and treatment (e.g., school nurse, MD, ED staff, etc.). 1 Utah Department of Health, Student Injury Report Data. 2 National Program for Playground Safety.