

# Backyard and Playground Safety



Play is an important part of a child's development. When playing outside, children can have fun and be adventurous. Play also provides children with an opportunity for social development and growth through interaction with other children.

The backyard or local playground provides opportunities to run, climb, swing, explore and play imaginary games. With careful planning, these environments can provide desirable challenges for children while maintaining their safety.

## Main causes of injury

Ideally, a play area needs to cater for various ages and interests and differing physical, social and mental abilities. If buying play equipment for home use, consider the child's age and abilities, and the equipment's quality, cost and maintenance. Play should be enjoyable but, most importantly, play should be safe. Children under five years should be supervised at all times when playing outdoors. Older children need adult supervision when using trampolines, equipment and bikes etc.

Some play and recreation equipment commonly associated with injuries include:

- monkey bars, trampolines, swings and climbing equipment (including tree houses)
- skateboards, in-line skates (roller blades) and mini-scooters.

Some typical backyard injuries include:

- falling onto concrete
- running into gates
- falling from fences, fence posts and balconies.

## Playground equipment

There are Australian safety standards that apply to playground equipment. It is up to you to check and make sure the equipment is suitable for your needs and situation.

Be aware of safety features to look for when buying play equipment. Do not assume that all products are safe.

## When assessing play equipment:

- Take into account a child's potential misuse of equipment (eg climbing onto the top of a cubby house roof).
- Check for gaps where a head, arm, leg or finger could get wedged.
- Regularly inspect and maintain equipment and remove hazards like nails, screws or bolts that jut out.
- Good hand grips are needed on climbing equipment. Consider the size of your children's hands in relation to the size of the hand grips.
- The maximum height of equipment should be 2.5m. Equipment that is over 1.5m high is not suitable for children under five years of age.
- Swings, slides and climbing equipment should have soft-fall material underneath to provide impact-absorbing surfaces. If you use woodchips, you need a depth of at least 300mm.
- Space equipment so that children playing on separate pieces of equipment at the same time do not crash into each other.
- Swings should be in a separate area with barriers to prevent traffic flow across their path.
- Playground equipment needs to be firmly set into the ground to ensure it is stable.
- If using community play equipment, make an assessment as to the safety and age appropriateness and report any problems to your local council.
- Rubber-soled closed-toe footwear will protect children's feet and give them a better grip when climbing (avoid loose sandals and thongs).
- Choose safe times for children to play on equipment. Avoid busy times, times when children are tired, and during wet

weather when equipment can be slippery.

- Children should not wear bicycle helmets in playgrounds due to the risk of entrapment or choking.

## Trampolines

Trampolines are not recommended for children under six years of age as they are more prone to serious injuries.

If possible, fit the trampoline with a safety net and spring and frame pads to reduce the risk of injury. If the trampoline is exposed to sun and rain, regularly check for holes in the mat and padding and any signs of rusting or other damage.

### Staying safe on trampolines:

- Only one child at a time should use the trampoline to reduce the risk of injury.
- Supervise children at all times, regardless of age.
- Do not attempt or allow somersaults.
- At no time should children be permitted to get underneath the trampoline.
- Drinking or eating while bouncing should not be allowed because of the possibility of inhaling food and choking.
- Teach your child to be careful when getting on and off the trampoline. At no time should children jump from the trampoline to the ground.
- Ensure that the area around the trampoline is free from hazards like walls, fences, play equipment and garden furniture. Check that the area overhead is clear from objects like clotheslines, trees and wires.

## Skating and scooters

Children who skateboard, roller-skate or use a mini-scooter should always wear a helmet to protect from serious head injury. It is also a good idea to wear wrist guards and elbow and kneepads. The younger the child the greater the risk of injury, due to the level of skill, coordination and balance required. Skateboarding is not recommended for children under six years of age.

### Safety tips:

- Always wear a helmet.
- Always supervise children, particularly when they are learning new skills.
- Novice skaters should learn the basics of controlled skating and stopping, and more experienced skaters should be encouraged to skate within their limits.
- Skating and scooting should not take place on roads or among pedestrians.
- Parks with wide footpaths or dual footpath/bike path are the best places for children to learn to skate and scooter.
- Don't use scooters or skate at night, as riders can't be seen and they can't see obstacles or other skaters.

## Key points to remember

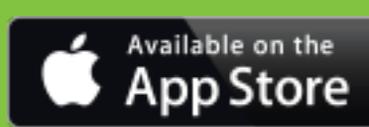
- Be aware of the safety features to look for when buying play equipment and ensure it complies with Australian safety standards.
- Trampolines are not recommended for children under six years due to risk of serious injury.
- Children should always be supervised by an adult when using a trampoline or learning how to use new equipment, regardless of age.

## More information

- The Royal Children's Hospital's [Falls Prevention](http://www.rch.org.au/falls/) (<http://www.rch.org.au/falls/>) website
- Kids Health Info fact sheet on [Falls Prevention](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Preventing_Falls/) ([www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Preventing\\_Falls/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Preventing_Falls/))
- For a list of relevant safety standards, [Kidsafe Victoria](http://www.kidsafevic.com.au/playground-safety/australian-playground-standards) (<http://www.kidsafevic.com.au/playground-safety/australian-playground-standards>)

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