

It's a Jungle Gym Out There!

During a four-year study conducted by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), more than 200,000 injuries resulted from outdoor playground equipment. Approximately 88% were attributable to climbers, swings, and slides.

One study published in *Pediatrics* reported interesting results associated with 204 pediatric patients injured due to falls from playground equipment. The mean age of children injured was 6.2 years; 56% were male. A seasonal variation was noted from June through August. This is consistent with a study by the National Safe Kids Campaign, which reported that the summer months pose a heightened risk for childhood injury. Fractures were reported most often (61%), and 90% of those were of the upper extremity.

The *American Journal for Public Health* found that 34% of playground injuries were related to climbers (monkey bars/jungle gyms), 30% from slides, and 22% from swings. Lillis and Jaffe reported in *Pediatric Emergency Care* that climbing apparatus accounted for 29% of playground-related injuries in children younger than age 5 and 47% of those in children older than age 5.

These findings help to identify key strategies you can use to prevent injuries caused by falls from playground equipment:

- **Maintain adequate amounts of impact-absorbing ground cover.** Replace hard surfaces with hardwood fiber/mulch, engineered wood fibers, sand, or pea gravel. You can also use unitary materials that meet ASTM Standard 1292 (synthetic or rubber tiles, shredded rubber, and mats).
- **Supervise high-risk equipment such as swings, climbers and slides closely.** Place one or two aides next to the equipment's highest accessible play surface. Closely supervise children under age 4, who may not have the grip strength or balance to navigate this equipment safely. Train supervisors to react quickly to prevent a fall or control behavior that may lead to pushing and shoving. Make sure supervisors have an unobstructed view of the equipment they are supervising and the entire playground area.
- **Never let a child use a jump rope near elevated play equipment** or swing on free-swinging chains and ropes. These items can be a strangulation hazard. Remove any free-swinging chains and ropes from play structures. Establish a designated area specifically for jump rope use far away from any possible entanglements.
- **Remove draw-strings on clothing, necklaces, and other items that hang around a child's neck before playtime.** These items can quickly turn into strangulation hazards if they get caught on playground equipment.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.