

Is your playground safe?

By Carlene Brown

While disguised as magical lands of primary colors, playgrounds serve kids in more ways than dishing out fun. Playgrounds are where kids exercise, make friends and learn about risk taking. While it seems like playgrounds have been around forever, many people can attest that they've changed their look a bit. Edges are rounded. Slides are shorter. Monkey bars are disappearing. What was metal is now plastic. These changes are designed to make playgrounds safer.

Playground equipment should be well-maintained, with no missing pieces, parts or dangling ropes. Equipment should also be free of deterioration, rust, splinters, exposed bolts and protruding parts that can get caught on clothing, like open S hooks, protruding bolts, and other dangerous hardware. Fear of litigation has led to removal of seesaws, high metal slides, long ropes and merry-go-rounds. The good news is that manufacturers have designed new versions of the old toys, such as smaller climbing walls, rope nets, spinners and artificial rocks.

The US Consumer Product Safety Commission's Public Playground Safety Checklist identifies ten conditions to inspect for safety:

1. Make sure surfaces around playground equipment have at least 12 inches of wood chips, mulch, sand, or pea gravel, or are mats made of safety-tested rubber or rubber-like materials.
2. Check that protective surfacing extends at least 6 feet in all directions from play equipment. For swings, be sure surfacing extends, in back and front, twice the height of the suspending bar.
3. Make sure play structures more than 30 inches high are spaced at least 9 feet apart.
4. Check for dangerous hardware, like open "S" hooks or protruding bolt ends.
5. 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.
6. Check for sharp points or edges in equipment.
7. Look out for tripping hazards, like exposed concrete footings, tree stumps, and rocks.
8. Make sure elevated surfaces, like platforms and ramps, have guardrails to prevent falls.
9. Check playgrounds regularly to see that equipment and surfacing are in good condition.
10. Carefully supervise children on playgrounds to make sure they're safe.

The checklist can be found at: <https://www.cpsc.gov/safety-education/safety-guides/playgrounds/public-playground-safety-checklist>

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) offers an industry leading certification program in playground safety, the Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) program. The CPSI prep course is available in a classroom setting or online. Your CPSI certification and exam is valid for three years. Renewal of the CPSI Certification is to ensure that professionals are knowledgeable of the current best practices in the field of playground safety. Registration information and a full description of this course can be found on the NRPA website.

WCIA will reimburse one registration and exam per member, per year. WCIA requires the following documentation:

- Copy of the invoice received from WRPA or NRPA
- Certificate of completion

Registration information and a full description of this course can be found on the NRPA website, at: [Certified Playground Safety Inspector Certification Program, CPSI | Certification | National Recreation and Park Association](#)

For further information, please contact your WCIA Risk Management Representative. The Risk Reps are all CPSI certified to inspect your playgrounds and would be delighted to make a visit, review your playgrounds, and take a spin on that merry-go-round!