

# Outdoor Fun

## Prevention key to a safe summer on playgrounds

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Linda Reetz sees the lacerations, fractures and eye and head injuries resulting from children having fun on playgrounds. A registered nurse and director of emergency services at Beaumont Hospital, she is also the mother of three boys.

With the arrival of summer's carefree days, Reetz is expecting an increase in young emergency room patients suffering from injuries which could have been prevented. Playground safety begins with parents. Even though the majority of playgrounds are inspected by the city or county, Reetz suggests parents find out if there is a child safety playground inspector assigned to their community who is responsible for ongoing maintenance.

"Being outside and being active is a wonderful thing for children, but with any activity there's always a risk of injury," said Reetz, a Troy resident. "Awareness is key. The ground covering is so important. They should be looking for wood chips or mulch, which is softest to fall on so they kind of get some resistance to the fall. Concrete you hit and it doesn't move."

According to the National Program for Playground Safety ([www.playgroundsafety.org](http://www.playgroundsafety.org)), every three minutes a child is treated in an emergency room for a playground-related injury. The nonprofit was founded in 1995 at the University of Northern Iowa with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to serve as a resource for educational and research information. In 2004, their survey results showed Michigan's grade on park playground safety improved from a D in 2000 to a C-plus. While that is good news, Reetz estimates that 70 percent of the 200,000 children injured on American playgrounds were from falls. Parental supervision is critical.

"Children under age 5 should not be on equipment taller than four feet. They're just not physically coordinated and don't have stamina to play on higher surfaces," said Reetz.

Karen Kapchonik is especially proud of Rotary Park in Livonia. It offers two major play structures, swing sets, a baseball diamond,

firepit. A certified staff of Livonia Parks & Recreation playground inspectors make sure children have fun while staying safe.

"There are so many different play structures throughout the community," said Karen Kapchonik, superintendent for Livonia Parks. "All of them are plastic, except for Beverly Park, which is all wood. Plastic is colorful, better for maintenance, longer wear."

"We always encourage residents to be eyes for us. If they see anything wrong to contact us. We have had to take swing sets down if we don't have protective fall material, a wood fiber, six to 12 inches to help break the fall."

Daniel Wright, owner of the Outdoor Fun Store in Wayne, says poured recycled rubber materials are the safest for cushioning falls, but costly. He recommends loose rubber, engineered wood fiber or triple-ground wood mulch for commercial and backyard play areas. Sand and pea gravel are also options.

Outdoor Fun services and installs residential and commercial equipment for schools and parks. He offers a number of tips for parents to keep kids safe this summer.

One of his favorite public play areas is located at the Summit on the Park in Canton. Its big wood castles, newer metal and plastic equipment and a spray park provide a wide variety of fun.

"If it's made from wood, make sure the corners are rounded, no exposed hardware that could injure a child," Wright said. "Have them sit on a swing or go down a slide and see how stable the structure is."

A major danger for children is playing on equipment with their bike helmet on.

"I know of quite a few incidents in the past where children have had problems with head entrapment where they could strangle themselves," Wright said. "The new equipment is designed to prevent this, but does not take into account bike helmets."

Reetz cautions parents about choking hazards. She said children should not wear clothing with drawstrings while playing.

"When she I was 6, I remember having a play structure in our backyard and seeing my older sister suspended on the slide," she the string from her jacket hood had gotten hung up on the slide and she was suspended and couldn't move. Luckily, my mom was right there and saved her, but I can still picture her suspended there to this day."