

Playground equipment



Playground equipment is provided by many organisations for use by children to help educate and entertain. This could be in schools, nurseries, care homes and so on where the children are either residents or just visiting.

The term 'playground equipment' covers any permanently fixed item used for outdoor play. Examples include climbing frames, swings, slides and roundabouts etc. It would also include this type of outdoor equipment where it is used indoors. Usually, it does not include equipment produced for use at home, soft-play areas, adventure playgrounds and skateboard parks as well as ancillary items (such as, fences, seats, litterbins etc.).

Because of the nature of the equipment and how it is used, it's essential that it is properly installed, cleaned and maintained. Obviously, adequate precautions must also be taken where the equipment becomes damaged or defective until this can be corrected.

Legal requirements

Generally, if someone is injured you may need to show that you have met your duty of care.

If you are an employer you must comply with the general requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. When it comes to the safe use of playground equipment, some important considerations include:

- making sure that it complies with relevant standards when purchased and is properly installed
- completing risk assessments to identify the precautions you need to take
- implementing those precautions, providing information and training for any employees and volunteers on what they need to do to ensure that it is used safely
- making periodic checks and regular inspections to ensure that it remains safe to use
- documenting your arrangements and responsibilities for using it, perhaps as part of your health and safety policy
- keeping records of what you have done.

In some circumstances, you may still have to meet some of the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 even if you are not an employer. This is where you control non-domestic premises and others use this equipment there.

Hazards to look out for

Typical hazards include:

- poor or inappropriate playing surfaces, including grass, gravel, cement, brick, and stone
- obstacles in the falling space
- choking, entanglement and entrapment hazards
- broken or missing rails
- inadequate space around equipment
- tripping hazards, such as damaged walking surfaces
- sharp, rough, or pinching edges on playground equipment
- poorly maintained or damaged equipment
- inadequate supervision.

Note: this list is not exhaustive.

Precautions you can take

Typical precautions include:

- making sure that any new equipment purchased meets the required standards
- ensuring that equipment is correctly installed, with adequate spacing provided around it
- checking that equipment is provided with adequate handrails, guardrails and barriers
- making sure any access is suitable i.e. ladders, stairs or ramps
- providing suitable playing surfaces
- completing any required maintenance at appropriate intervals
- preventing access to unsafe equipment or areas, displaying appropriate signage in these instances
- carrying out suitable inspections and checks
- providing any necessary information and training for staff.

Note: this list is not exhaustive.

Making a start

ACTION	GUIDANCE
<p>1. Make sure that any equipment provided meets the required standards and is properly installed.</p>	<p>The two main standards associated with playground equipment are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ BS EN 1176: Playground Equipment and Surfacing ■ BS EN 1177: Impact Attenuating Playground Surfacing, Determination of Critical Fall Height. <p>BS EN 1176 sets out general requirements along with specific ones relating to swings; slides; runways; carousels; and rocking equipment. It also details standards for installation, inspection, maintenance and operation of the equipment.</p> <p>BS EN 1176 is not retrospective. Therefore, older equipment might meet previous standards such as BS 5696 or DIN 7926. For other items, you may need to look for evidence that it has undergone third party testing (e.g. they may carry a TÜV certificate or a BSI Kitemark).</p> <p>Equipment must be installed properly by someone who is competent. This should be in accordance with the standards mentioned, relevant building regulations and any manufacturer's instructions.</p>
<p>2. Where you are required to do so, complete formal risk assessments to check that the precautions you have in place are adequate.</p> <p>If they are not, identify any additional ones that are needed and implement these where necessary.</p> <p>Make a note of what you have done, including details of those responsible for taking any action.</p>	<p>Where you are an employer, you will need to complete formal risk assessments. These should check the adequacy of any existing precautions, noting anything further that needs to be done.</p> <p>Before you begin, it is useful for you to identify any specific health and safety regulations and guidance that might apply to you. This is freely available at www.hse.gov.uk. Doing this will help you identify the standards you must meet to protect people. In most cases, understanding these will help you decide if you are doing enough.</p> <p>You should remember that risk assessments must be completed by someone who is competent. You should discuss completing them with those you have appointed to advise you on health and safety matters (i.e. your 'competent person' under Regulation 7 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations). They should be able to advise you on the best approach to be adopted and who should complete them. You may have to provide information and training for those doing this.</p> <p>If you intend to use the services of a health and safety consultant, you should check that they are registered on the Occupational Safety and Health Consultants Register (OHSCR). Further information is available at www.oshcr.org.</p> <p>If you employ five or more people, you must record the significant findings of your assessment. Further information, tools and templates are available at www.hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm.</p> <p>You must review (and amend) any assessment you make where you think it is no longer valid or there has been a significant change. You should record when this is done.</p>

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<p>3. Make periodic checks to ensure that the equipment, areas and other features remain safe.</p> <p>Make a note of the checks you make and any issues identified.</p> <p>Carry out any routine maintenance that might be required.</p>	<p>A post-installation inspection should be carried out.</p> <p>After that, routine visual inspections will be required to identify any hazards resulting from vandalism, use or weather. The frequency of these should be determined by your risk assessment. Usually, these are completed daily or weekly depending on your own particular circumstances. Manufacturers will recommend inspection frequencies, however, where there is an increased risk of vandalism or for 'high-use' sites, more frequent checks may be necessary.</p> <p>You may also need to complete further operational inspections (usually every one to three months) or as recommended. This would be to check the operation and stability of the equipment, identify any wear (including any sealed parts) etc.</p> <p>Over and above this, you will also need to ensure that an annual inspection is completed.</p> <p>It is a good idea to prepare an inspection schedule for each playground, listing the equipment and components to be checked, the methods for doing so and the frequency. This can be developed using the risk assessments you have prepared.</p> <p>All inspections must be completed by someone who is competent. In particular, for annual inspections these must be completed by someone qualified by the Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII). Further information is available at www.playinspectors.com. The RPII is the official UK body for examining, accrediting and certifying inspectors of inflatable, indoor and outdoor play. It also accredits courses for the training of inspectors.</p> <p>It is important that you keep records of any inspections that you make and any reports of defects made, including any action you take to rectify them.</p> <p>You should make arrangements for any routine maintenance to be carried out in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. This could include the security of fixings, painting and staining, surfacing maintenance, lubrication and cleaning.</p> <p>You will also need to consider how any defects identified are going to be put right. If this can't be done immediately and they present a significant danger, you will need to provide additional precautions to guard against them. Where alterations are required, these should only be carried out after agreement with the supplier or other competent person.</p>
<p>4. Ensure that employees and volunteers who supervise use of the equipment are aware of any precautions required.</p> <p>Make a note of any information or training that is provided to individuals.</p>	<p>The level of information and training required will vary depending on the nature of the equipment provided and your own particular circumstances. If you have completed formal risk assessments, these will help you determine what is necessary. In particular, you may want to advise them about their specific responsibilities during use.</p> <p>You should keep records of any information or training you provide. These should contain detail relating to the persons who were trained (including their signatures to say that they have received and understood it); when they were trained and by whom; an overview of the training that was provided etc.</p>

ACTION	GUIDANCE
<p>5. Document your arrangements and responsibilities for the safe use of playground equipment.</p> <p>Review these where necessary, particularly if you suspect that they are no longer valid.</p> <p>Keep the records you have made.</p>	<p>If you need to prepare a health and safety policy, you could record your arrangements as part of it.</p> <p>In the event of a claim, paperwork will be important. Therefore, it is advisable to keep records. These could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ certificates of tests or compliance with standards ■ design and tender documents ■ maintenance instructions ■ operating instructions from the supplier ■ risk assessments ■ inspection records ■ your own inspection and maintenance recommendations ■ training records ■ those relating to any accidents, including any subsequent investigations.

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available on our [website](#).

Further guidance and resources are also available at: www.hse.gov.uk and from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) at www.rospace.com.

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided by the Enforcing Agency for your region. This will be freely available on their website.

Need to contact us?

For further advice Ecclesiastical customers can call our risk advice line on **0345 600 7531** (Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, excluding bank holidays) or email us at risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com and one of our experts will call you back within 24 hours.

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