Injury Prevention: Playground Fall-Related Injuries

Playgrounds are fun and provide a great opportunity for exercise and family togetherness. But did you know that youths age 17 and younger are at risk for falls on the playground? These falls can result in injuries, like bruises, scrapes, and some that may even require a trip to the emergency department (ED).

Kentucky youths\(^1\) averaged 2,069 annual visits to emergency departments due to playground falls from 2016-2021.

The median cost of an ED visit was $1,800.

\(^1\)The term “youth” is limited to Kentucky residents 17 years of age and younger.

Playground Fall-Related ED Visits\(^2\) among Kentucky Youth\(^1\) by Year, 2016–2021\(^3\)

Playground Fall-Related ED Visits\(^2\) among Kentucky Youth\(^1\) by Age Group, Race, and Sex, 2016–2021\(^3\)

Quick Stats

Kentucky youth ED visits for playground fall-related injuries:
- 52% occurred among youth aged 5-8
- 53% were male
- 89% were white

\(^2\)ED visits represent encounters of care and could be greater than the number of individual patients treated in Kentucky.

\(^3\)The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic that started in 2020 should be considered when interpreting data and trend analyses.

Data source: Kentucky Outpatient Services Database, Office of Health Data and Analytics. February 2023. Data are provisional and subject to change.
Every year from 2016 to 2021, Kentucky averaged 58 ED visits for playground fall-related TBIs.

Playground Fall-Related Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) ED Visits among Kentucky Youth by Year, 2016–2021

School are the most common location for playground fall-related injuries resulting in ED visits.

Playground Fall-Related ED Visits among Kentucky Youth by Place of Injury, 2016–2021

The most common playground fall-related injuries seen in the ED among youth were fractures (56%), and superficial injuries or contusions (15%).

Playground Fall-Related ED Visits among Kentucky Youth by Playground Equipment Type and Injured Body Region, 2016–2021

Details on place of injury were available for only 31% of ED injury visits.

Note: Percentage may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
Playground Safety Checklist

Does the surface surrounding the playground equipment have at least a foot of materials (mulch, sand, wood chips, etc.) to protect against injuries from falls?

Make sure the protective surfaces extend at least 6 feet in all directions from the playground equipment.

Make sure that playground equipment that is more than 2.5 feet tall is spaced at least 9 feet from any other equipment.

Look for protruding fasteners (bolts), sharp points and edges, and other hardware that can pose dangers to kids.

Look for tripping hazards! These can include raised surfaces, exposed concrete footings, rocks, and tree roots.

Make sure that all elevated surfaces have guardrails to help prevent falls and injuries.

Regularly check playground equipment and surfaces.

Supervise your kids when they are on the playground.

Additional Resources


Children’s Safety Network: https://www.childrenssafetynetwork.org/injury-topics/playground-safety

National Program for Playground Safety: https://playgroundsafety.org/

A parent’s role at the playground:

- Teach kids to safely and properly use equipment
- Supervise other kids
- Provide first aid if an injury does occur

Designed using resources from Flaticon.com.
This product was supported by grants numbers NU17CE924846 (CDC) and 3048114413. Produced by the Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center, as bona fide agent for the Kentucky Department for Public Health. February 2023.