

Preventing Monkey Bar Injuries

Proactive Protocols That Can Help Your Students Stay Safe

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Monkey bars, or overhead play events, continue to inspire healthy play while offering a new thrill to keep kids engaged and active. They benefit children by helping to build upper and core body strength, enhance agility and reinforce hand-eye coordination, and can be an important part of their development. However, they also have been a leading cause of playground injuries. Over the last 5 years, roughly 35% of CSDSIP's playground injury claims were monkey bars related. If your playground features monkey bars, proactive protocols can keep kids from being injured and help protect your community.

Understanding how children fall is helpful in reducing playground injuries. Monkey bars mishaps most often produce upper body and extremity injuries for two reasons. First, younger children's centers of gravity are relatively high compared to adults, so they are prone to landing head-first, especially if falling from a height that allows any body repositioning. Second, instinctual self-preservation reflexes that are meant to protect them can actually cause lesser but significant hand, wrist and arm injuries.

Addressing Monkey Bar Injuries

Reduce the exposure

The following steps should be taken to reduce injuries on your playground:

Age-appropriate height and spacing

- Preschool age students (4 – 5 years old) should use equipment no more than 60" tall with bars no more than 12" apart; school

age kids can have 84" tall equipment with bars spaced up to 15" apart. Bars must be at least 9" apart to prevent entrapment.

Guidance & Supervision

- Establish and enforce rules for safe use of the equipment.
- Use the equipment only when it is dry. Check before use and wipe off if necessary.
- Maintain adequate space between users to eliminate any pressure to move too quickly.
- Use the equipment only as designed. Do not allow students to stand on top of the bars, hang upside-down, or play games that aim to knock others off the equipment.
- Keep the area under the equipment clear of other activity when in use.
- Using spotters. Children who are 4th grade or younger who can use monkey bars should be spotted by staff members. Such action may seem impractical, but it allows the equipment to be used without endangering the children in your programs and eliminates any injury-associated costs. A spotter will be able to catch them as they start to fall and bring them to the ground safely (but would render the staff member unavailable for other concurrent supervisory duties).

Maintain appropriate surfaces underneath equipment

- The CPSC's *Public Playground Safety Handbook* suggests there be a minimum of 9" of resilient (loose fill or unitary shock absorbing) surface to prevent serious head trauma. Please note that these surfaces may not reduce fractures or lesser injuries.

Maintenance

- Inspect equipment for damage and the surface underneath for adequacy and compaction of resilient material at least weekly

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Eliminate the exposure

Because younger students (kindergarten - 2nd grade) ages five to seven, generally have insufficient upper body strength to traverse monkey bars safely some schools have chosen to eliminate monkey bars altogether. Doing so may eliminate or reduce the frequency and severity of playground injuries. However, this would be a business decision for each school district.

Monkey bar designs have evolved over the years, making it a difficult decision for Members as to whether to keep the bars on playgrounds or not. If they are still on your playgrounds or if you are considering installing them, be sure to review your current practices and add whatever new protocols you need in order to prevent unnecessary injury to your students, especially the younger, more vulnerable ones.

Playgrounds help in the development of children's creative and physical skills and are an important part of growing up. Please make sure that when students use them, they are as safe as possible.

For any questions and/or concerns please contact our Risk Control Department at 303-722-2600.

What Insurances Coverage Does the Member Have?

Under the CSDSIP School Entity Liability (SEL) Coverage, the Pool would defend a claim or suit brought against the Member for an occurrence directly resulting from the playground, subject to the policy terms, conditions and deductible, as well as the Colorado Governmental Immunity Act (CGIA).

The CGIA currently provides limited immunity from liability for these types of tort actions and claims. Any claim would be investigated and considered on a case by case basis to assure there is not a waiver of CGIA.

Any damages to the monkey bars (playground) equipment would be covered under the Member's Property Coverage subject to the policy terms, conditions and deductible.

Acknowledgements

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