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Serious playground injuries down in Ontario

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Recent initiatives to improve playground safety in Ontario appear to be paying off, because the number of the most serious injuries in children using playground equipment has decreased, said a study released on Wednesday.

Margaret Keresteci of the Canadian Institute for Health Information credits the improvement to changes like height restrictions on playground equipment and the replacement of hard surfaces. *(CBC)*

Ontario emergency departments received 8,734 visits due to playground injuries in 2004-2005, up slightly from 8,698 in 2002-2003, according to data released by the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

However, it found that in general, the more debilitating injuries are on the decline. The number of head injuries serious enough to require a hospital stay of at least one night dropped dramatically in 2004-2005, to 37 from 131 in 2002-2003.

A spokesperson for the institute, Margaret Keresteci, credits changes like height restrictions on playground equipment and the replacement of hard surfaces under equipment with softer surfaces in order to cushion falls.

Despite the changes, 23 children a day go to an Ontario emergency room with injuries sustained on a playground, the report said. Bone fractures are the most frequently seen injury and those breaks generally involve arms, wrists or elbows.

Children aged 5 to 9 most at risk In 2004-2005, children aged five to nine had the highest number of visits to an emergency department due to playground injuries among all age groups, with 4,744. They accounted for 54 per cent of all visits.

The five- to nine-year-olds also had the highest number of hospital stays, of at least one night, with 335, or 61 per cent of overall cases.

Children aged 10 to 14 had the second-highest proportion of emergency department visits for playground injuries - 2,018 or 23 per cent.

Those under the age of five had the third-highest number of visits at 1,469 or 17 per cent, and the second-highest number of hospitalizations for playground injuries in Ontario, with 111 hospital stays of at least one night.

The information collected is used by policy-makers, researchers, coroners, trauma-care providers and injury-prevention specialists to develop and monitor injury prevention and treatment programs, the institute said.

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