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Childhood Fall Injuries – It’s a Worry

Having a safe environment in which to live, work and play is pretty important to us all and that is what makes North Shore such a great place. You may not realise that each year there are hundreds of children admitted to North Shore Hospital resulting from a fall injury and 5-9 year olds are particularly at risk. These fall injuries are classified as ‘unintentional injury’ and are therefore ‘avoidable injuries’. Falls from playground equipment are the most common cause of injury and these contribute to almost half of all childhood injury hospitalisations. Playground equipment located in a school, home, other institution, or public areas contribute to almost two- thirds of these. In 2011 there were 66 children (5-9 year olds) admitted to North Shore Hospital (24 hrs or more) and many others were injured but not admitted.

As parents and carers, we can’t prevent all falls and in life, we expect a few bumps and bruises along the journey but we can be more vigilant and make a special effort to manage the risks better. I like to think that I consider the capabilities of the child and allow their participation that does not over-extend their boundaries that are clearly beyond their physical ability. If you are able to influence their play activity with injury prevention in mind, you will be not only helping the child, but also helping to reduce the overly high number of childhood injuries we experience locally on the Shore. If you think that your local playground is lacking in injury prevention measures (damaged equipment or surfaces lacking impact absorbing materials), then it is time to contact those that are responsible for that particular playground and suggest appropriate action. Falls occurring from heights greater than 1.5 meters are the main injury-causing falls so therefore, controlling the maximum height is a good step to avoiding injury. Research also tells us that boys are more at risk than girls and that is perhaps generally due to a more adventurous and exploring nature so there is reason to be more risk aware with young boys especially if they display that spirit.

Source: Data provided by the Injury Prevention Research Unit (IPRU), University of Otago, and Safekids NZ factsheet March 2012.

