

From: tnevin tnevin@sipeknekatik.ca
Subject: FW: Playgrounds and COVID-19
Date: March 26, 2020 at 1:40 PM
To: allstaff@sipeknekatik.ca, bandcouncil@sipeknekatik.ca



Sent from my Samsung Galaxy smartphone.

----- Original message -----

From: "Boyles, Karen (SAC/ISC)" <karen.boyles@canada.ca>
Date: 2020-03-26 1:29 p.m. (GMT-04:00)
To: "tnevin@sipeknekatik.ca" <tnevin@sipeknekatik.ca>
Subject: FW: Playgrounds and COVID-19

Hi Tina, Here is some information on playgrounds and Covid 19, some things to consider.

Karen



Dear CPSI E-News subscriber,

Our office and instructors have been getting questions regarding whether or not organizations should close their playgrounds under the current circumstances. We hope that the information in the article below, written by our lead instructor Scott Belair, will assist you in making the decisions your organizations need to make.

To playground or not to playground under COVID-19

For some reason I feel I need to start this article off with a disclaimer. It feels like the information currently available on novel coronavirus, COVID-19, or the newest name I have heard: SARS-CoV-2 (formerly called HCoV-19) is changing not only day by day but hour by hour and sometimes more frequently than that. The information in this article is information we believe to be accurate at the time of publishing this article, but it could have changed by the time you read it.

GermS at the Playground in a COVID-19 World

Chances are if a playground is teeming with children, it's also teeming with germs. COVID-19 is the most recent challenge in the transfer of germs and/or disease amongst children in a play environment.

After all, before children touch play equipment (and one another), kids have been known to sneeze with abandon and wipe their noses with their hands. Handwashing after using the bathroom may prove too time-consuming to a child who wants to get back to the playground and have fun. And toddlers clad in leaky diapers may sit on spring toys, slides, or swings. The end result: Many playgrounds contain some pretty nasty types of germs – COVID-19 could now possibly be one of many germs that may be present on a common surface such as a playground component.

The Reality

In most outdoor playspaces, the play equipment is cleaned infrequently, if at all. Most playground owner/operators count on Mother Nature to do the cleaning. And for the most part, Mother Nature does a good job. However, there are still plenty of germs at an outdoor playground. Nasty germs can spread across the playground, as small hands grasp the swing chain, use the hand-grips at the monkey bars, and push off from the slide. It turns out, the playground may be many times more germ-infested than virtually any surface in your home. In addition to the germs already at the playground, already sick children also in attendance at the local park can present even more of a health threat to a child.

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Without consistent, proper cleaning and sanitation, public playground equipment can be a breeding ground for a host of bacteria and germs that cause mild to serious health issues. Norovirus, E. coli, salmonella, hepatitis A, coronaviruses and heaven for bid the current COVID-19 (a type of coronavirus) are just a few of the common bacterium and viruses that can be found in a public setting such as a playspace.

Studies, such as one published in the New England Journal of Medicine on March 18, show COVID-19 can live 3 days on plastic and steel and some municipalities have begun attempting to close or sanitize their playground equipment already because of this information. **In the opinion of the author** (of the article you are reading now, not the New England Journal article), **sanitizing equipment in conjunction with effective signage is a better practice than closing equipment**. Any method of 'closing' equipment often just presents a different type of hazard. Fencing or barricades are more often than not just another hazard that might be encountered for a determined visitor that wishes to use playground equipment. Bright orange snow fencing (as another example of an attempted playground closure) often serves as a beacon to attract young users. Another local municipality inquired about using rope – which would actually make the play area non-compliant as a potential strangulation or clothesline hazard.

Owner/operators of playgrounds and playspaces do face the challenge of keeping surfaces clean without creating a hazard for users through barriers, hazardous chemicals and without damaging equipment and surfacing during cleaning.

As we talk about '**social distancing**' – it is the opinion of the author playground equipment at your local park or school is just as safe (or dangerous) today as it was last month or last year (meaning the selection of components on site has not changed the situation). The biggest challenge in today's COVID-19 world is that playspaces have historically represented social gathering places. Seemingly the biggest risk is not the equipment, but rather the biggest risk is other users or other people spreading COVID-19 while at a public venue (such as a local park or playground).

The science of COVID-19 is still quite preliminary, and experts do not actually know how readily contaminated surfaces cause infection. What experts do know is most cases of COVID-19 come from direct person-to-person contact. Experts acknowledge that coming into contact with contaminated surfaces most likely contributes to the outbreak, but this type of 'common surface spreading' has not yet been documented.

Medical professionals are focussing on a 1.8 metre (or 6 ft.) distance or separation (which is coincidentally a distance folks in the playground industry are already extremely familiar with and should not find hard to remember).

So how can we sanitize outdoor public playgrounds to a reasonable level?

Read playground manufacturers instruction manual first. The playground owners' manual and instructions are a great place to start. These should have come with your play equipment upon initial installation and should be the best source of information on how to clean the structures, including which may or may not include detergents and cleaning methods to use or avoid. The owners' manual can be a treasure trove of information on how to maintain your playground and prolong its longevity. Too often these manuals get lost or overlooked. How to sanitize your play equipment may be one of many tidbits of useful information inside.

Below is a normal course of action for sanitizing and cleaning playground equipment:

- Start by using a power washer on metals and plastics (be sure to start on the lowest / least powerful setting to help ensure no damage to the equipment). PVC coated platforms can also be power washed, albeit you will need to pay special attention to any cracks in the PVC coating to avoid lifting, peeling, or spreading of these areas which can leading to a larger maintenance problem down the road.
- A low pressure sprayer may be more optimal than a power washer.
- **Harsh chemicals like bleach or chlorine should never be used to clean playground equipment.** If you have used any chemicals, leave the play equipment closed for a minimum of 24 hours to allow contaminants and contagions time to dissipate.
- **If you need to use chemicals, ensure they are approved for use.** Consider products that are intended for playground such as: <https://www.wysiwash.com/effersan> or environmentally friendly products such as: <https://monofoilusa.com/monofoil-d>
- Make sure any staff operating a washer or sprayer is in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to avoid contaminated water droplets.
- Wood cannot or should not be power washed as it can become abrasive and the water pressure can cause damage to wood surfaces. On wood, use a brush with warm soapy water

pressure can cause damage to wood surfaces. On wood, use a brush with warm soapy water. Also use warm soapy water on anything sticky. All playground surfaces can be wiped clean with a disinfecting wipe or brush with warm soapy water – it's just like washing a car!!!

Please note: a misconception is that you need to use hot water. Water of any temperature is sufficient.

- Degreasers should not be used to clean plastics, bubble panels or any type of window as it can cloud up and inhibit visibility and can permanently damage these materials.
- Wipe down the most commonly used areas such as handrails, climber rungs, etc. with a damp cloth and a mild detergent.
- Soft bristle brushes can be used to get rid of dirt on plastics, get into crevices and to clean ropes.
- Synthetic poured-in-place surfacing: use vacuum or blower as a good cleaning practice, but recognize this will likely have no effect on any germs or coronavirus. Do not use a power washer as it can cause damage to the surface. Consult the manufacturer (or owners manual) about what types of cleaning agents may be used to sanitize the surface.
- Loose fill surfacing such as sand can be cleaned with a sifter and potentially a mild detergent.
- Engineered wood fibres: A mixture of 3 parts water to 1 part liquid laundry detergent has been demonstrated in the past to help remove and/or eliminate surface microbial growth such as nuisance molds and mushroom growth.
- Consider leaving hand sanitizer station(s) at your playspaces along with instructions signage to apply before and after each use in accordance with local health regulations or instructions on the manufacturers label. Maintain a record on file of what has been done by maintenance staff in this regard and inspection and replace these sanitizers when appropriate.

Other steps to consider:

- Have enough trash receptacles on site: If you make it easier for people to keep things tidy, you will have less to clean yourself. Also, keep these trash receptacles outside the playground surfacing, and at an acceptable distance (not too far away or they will not get used, not so close they interfere with play or create an opportunity for germ transfer to the play area). Make sure trash receptacles are attached to something (in-ground or chained up to avoid tipping, moving, maintenance).
- Keep snack areas separate from play areas: By creating a separate area for snacking and placing washrooms or port-a-potties nearby, as well as hand sanitizing stations nearby, you can maintain a food-free play area.
- As we start to approach summer, the UV rays from the sun will help start to kill any germs that may be present on play equipment.

How can we advise the public about the perils of germs on outdoor public playgrounds?

Consider signage. Every playspace installed in Canada since 2003 has required an owner/operator to identify their name and contact information in each playspace to comply with CSA Z614 Clause 16.1 for owner/operator identification signage. Many playground owner/operators use this owner/operator signage to convey more information than just the owner/operator name and contact information. This signage often includes information such as:

- Adult supervision is recommended
- Hours of use (for bylaw enforcement)
- Inspect play area before using the equipment
- No running, pushing, or shoving
- Do not use equipment when wet/snowy conditions exist
- Use proper footwear
- No bicycle, roller blade or skateboard use in the play area

- Do not wear bicycle helmets while on play equipment
- No pets allowed
- Playground equipment is not to be used when ground is frozen
- **Thoroughly clean hands before and after each use**
- **Consult local health regulations prior to each use concerning transfer of virus and/or disease**
- There is a fine of \$XX for damage or defacing public property
- Dial 9-1-1 in case of emergency
- Consider the addition of a GPS address of the playground location (for emergency crews).
- If you have any concerns about this play area please call XXX-XXX-XXXX
- We appreciate your co-operation, please play safely

So, consider adding to your owner/operator signage to indicate washing or sanitizing hands before and after each use. Although we hope users utilize a disinfecting wipe or alcohol based hand sanitizer to clean their hands before and after, by avoiding specific instructions an owner/operator can avoid being held potentially liable or responsible for how a user may/may not following your instructions on any of the points listed above.

Surely the extra few lines of text will be insignificant in the cost of the overall playspace. If your signage is already installed, consider the use of an adhesive. Although the adhesive is unlikely to last throughout the life of the play equipment, at \$2-\$3 per adhesive cost is usually a non-factor in budget decisions and these adhesives are easily replaced during regular inspections of the playspace.

What Should Playground Owners Tell The Public During The COVID-19 Pandemic?

In the end, the best way to ensure a member of the public would not catch COVID-19 from one of our playspaces is to follow local health regulations during the COVID-19 crisis. Advising a member of the public to 'skip' a busy playground with lots of users is also a very reasonable suggestion. Advising a member of the public to use a disinfecting wipe to sanitize apparatus that they may be about to use both before and after is a reasonable suggestion when there are few or no other users currently in the play area. Closing a playspace with one of the methods mentioned above is an impractical option – albeit closing a playspace can give the perception we are 'taking action' – and these decisions are best be made at a local level. I do not think any of you need instruction from a national playground training institute to advise you on what may or may not keep a member of the public or local councillor satisfied.

Hopefully by working together to keep our playspaces and recreational facilities clean we can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and/or other communicable diseases. If you have further questions on how to clean and sanitize your specific playground, other than what has been stated above, you should contact your local playground equipment sales representative.

Regards,

Scott Belair
 CCPI, CPSI, B.Sc.
 Instructor, Canadian Playground Safety Institute
scott.belair@cpsionline.ca
 416-580-5437

Scott Belair has 20+ years of experience in the playground and play equipment field. Scott is President of Reliable Reporting, a company known for the development of playground auditing software. He is a member of the Canadian Standards Association Z614 technical committee for play equipment and also a member of the American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM). Scott is an instructor for the Canadian Playground Safety Institute and a certified playground inspector in both the U.S. and Canada. Scott's experience ventures from manufacturing and installations earlier in his career - now into promoting an auditing software program, performing safety audits and training courses throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia.

