

As the warm weather approaches parents start thinking about how their children can avoid injuries outdoors. Dr. Theodore Talma answers some of these questions. Dr. Talma is Board Certified in Pediatric Medicine and is a partner in Community Care Physicians Latham Pediatrics Group located in the Capital Region Health Park in Latham, NY. (518-783-3110). Dr. Talma has been providing healthcare services for the children of the Capital District since 1981.

QUESTION: *I'm looking forward to bringing my children to the playground this spring, how can I reduce the chance that they'll get hurt while playing?*

ANSWER: Children can experience wonderful hours of play, exercise and fresh air on the playground however you are correct to be concerned about their safety. In fact, every two-and-a-half minutes a child in the United States is injured on a playground. By taking some simple precautions you can reduce the chance your child will get hurt at a school playground, a fast-food restaurant playground or even in your own backyard.

First, supervise your children at all times to be sure they don't push, shove or crowd each other while playing. Check the equipment they are using to be certain that it is well maintained and has no sharp points or jagged edges. Play areas should be fenced in to prevent children from moving into busy streets.

Many injuries that occur on climbing equipment, swings and slides can be avoided if the equipment is appropriate for the child's age and height. In the summer check that the metal equipment is not too hot from the sun before you let the children play. Don't forget to look at the surface under the equipment to be sure there are no visible hazards such as broken glass or protruding rocks. The surface underneath the equipment will need to cushion their fall so avoid asphalt, grass, soil and concrete surfaces whenever possible.

Finally, make sure that the clothing your children wear is appropriate for a playground. One important step you can take is to remove or cut the hood and neck drawstrings from their clothing. Tragically, children have died when these drawstrings were caught on playground equipment.

QUESTION: *My nine year old is registered to play baseball this season for the first time and I've volunteered to be one of the assistant coaches. Do you have any tips I can pass along to make sure that the kids are learning how to take the proper safety precautions while having a great time out there on the field?*

ANSWER: This is a great question that many parents ask. Actually, there are close to 6 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 playing in softball or baseball leagues in the United States each year and more than 125,000 of them are injured badly enough that they go to emergency rooms for treatment. Many sports and health groups including the American Academy of Pediatrics have put together tips to help reduce injuries while playing baseball or softball. These tips can apply just as well to adult ball players.

First, take your child to the doctor for a physical exam before they begin any training program or competitive sport. Your doctor can evaluate if your child has special injury risks that need to be considered.

Both parents and coaches should require that the children warm up and stretch before playing and that first aid is available at all games and practices.

Insist that your child wears all the required safety gear at every game or practice.

Children need to wear a helmet when batting, waiting to bat or running the bases. The helmets should be equipped with either safety goggles or face guards to protect the eyes.

Their shoes should have molded cleats. Adequate rest periods must be given and pitching time should be limited. If your child is a catcher, make sure that all additional safety gear including the catcher's mitt, face mask, throat guard, long-model chest protector and shin guards are worn and fit properly.

Please teach your children not to play through pain. If your child does get injured, see your doctor and get the doctor's approval before your child returns to play. Most importantly, keep the games fun and enjoyable for all so that the children don't push to the point that they risk injury.