

Dear customers,

We have been getting questions regarding whether or not organizations should close their playgrounds under the current circumstances. We hope that the information based on the article below by Scott Belair, lead instructor for the Canadian Playground Safety Institute, will help you make your decision.

*Inspired by the original text by Scott Belair  
Translated and adapted by Jambette Playground  
Equipment Inc.*

# To playground or not to playground under COVID-19



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Please note that to the best of our knowledge, the information in this article was accurate at the time of publishing, but may have changed by the time you read it.



## GERMS AT THE PLAYGROUND IN A COVID-19 WORLD

Chances are that if a playground is teeming with children, it's also teeming with germs. And COVID-19 represents a major challenge in a play environment.

After all, before children touch play equipment (and each other), they've 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.

### THE REALITY

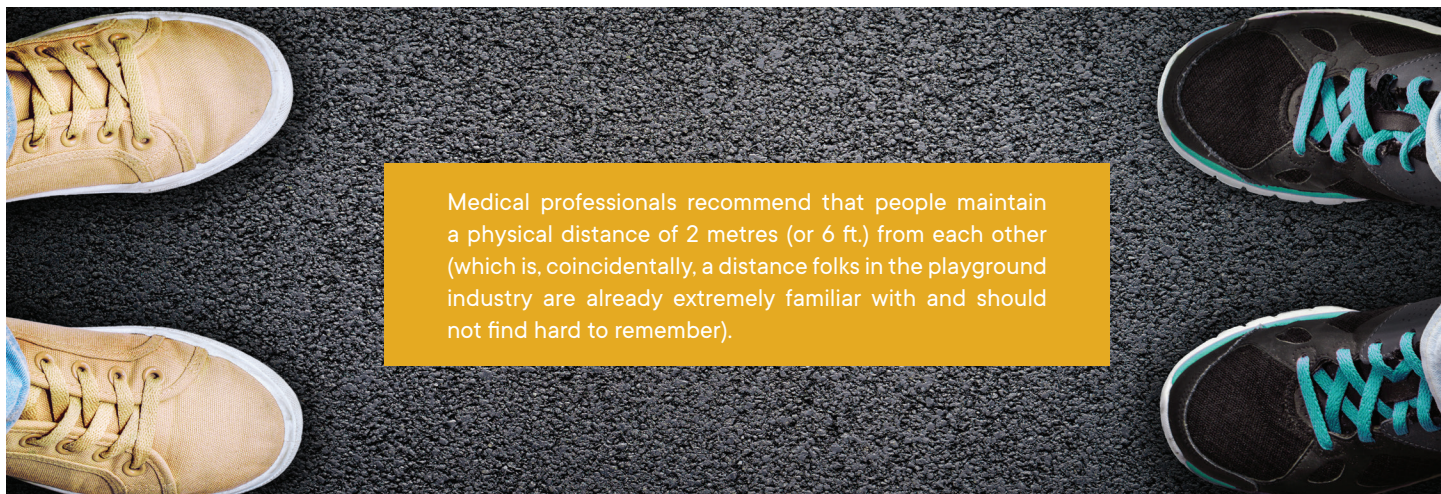
**In most outdoor playspaces, the play equipment is cleaned infrequently, if at all.** Most playground owner/operators count on Mother Nature to do the cleaning. And for the most part, Mother Nature does a good job. However, there are still plenty of germs at an outdoor playground. Nasty germs can spread quickly as small hands grasp the swing chain, use the handgrips on the monkey bars, and push off from the slide. It turns out that playgrounds may be home to way more germs than virtually any surface in your home. And sick children playing there can be an even greater health threat than the germs already on the playground equipment.

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, and coronaviruses—including the new COVID-19 coronavirus—are just a few of the common bacteria and viruses that can be found in public playspaces.

Owner/operators of playgrounds and playspaces face a constant challenge in keeping surfaces clean without damaging them or creating hazards for users through the use of barriers and hazardous chemicals

In these times of "**social distancing**", I believe that playground equipment at your local park or school is just as safe (or dangerous) today as it was last month or last year. The main problem with playgrounds in today's COVID-19 world is that they are social gathering places. **In other words, the biggest risk isn't the equipment, but rather the people who may spread COVID-19 when they use public parks and playgrounds.**

The science of COVID-19 is still quite preliminary, and experts don't actually know how readily contaminated surfaces cause infection. What they do know is that 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 transmission has not yet been documented.



Medical professionals recommend that people maintain a physical distance of 2 metres (or 6 ft.) from each other (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?

Start by reading the playground owners' manual provided with your play equipment. It's packed with useful information.

Below is a standard procedure 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 avoid damaging the equipment). PVC coated platforms can also be power washed, but you will need to pay special attention to any cracks in the PVC coating to avoid lifting, peeling, or spreading, which can lead to bigger maintenance problems down the road.

- Make sure that maintenance staff wear personal protective equipment (PPE) to avoid contaminated water droplets.
- Wood 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. Also use warm soapy water on anything sticky. In fact, all playground surfaces can be cleaned with a disinfecting wipe or with warm soapy water and a brush – it's just like washing a car!!!

Please note: There's no need to use hot water. Water of any temperature is sufficient.



- A low pressure sprayer may be a better option than a power washer.
- If you need to use chemicals, ensure they are approved for use. Consider products specially designed for playgrounds such as Effersan (<https://www.wysiwash.com/effersan>) or environmentally friendly products such as Monofoil-d (<https://monofoilusa.com/monofoil-d>)
- Disinfectants, household cleaners, and bleach are meant to be used to clean surfaces. Never use these products on the skin or internally (e.g. by swallowing or injecting these products) as this could cause serious harm (<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19.html>)
- Degreasers should not be used to clean plastics, bubble panels, or any type of window as they can cloud them up, inhibit visibility, and cause permanent damage.
- 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 clean ropes.
- Synthetic poured-in-place surfacing: Vacuums and blowers have little effect on germs or coronaviruses. 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 with a mild detergent if required.
- 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 fungus.
- Install one or more hand sanitizer stations at your playspaces along with instructions on the importance of sanitizing hands after using the equipment in accordance with local health regulations or the manufacturer's directions. Keep a maintenance log and inspect and replace the hand 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. Make sure the trash receptacles are not installed on the playground surface, but rather at an acceptable distance (not so far away that they will not get used, but not so close as to 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 prevent them from being tipped or moved and to facilitate maintenance.
- Keep snack areas separate from play areas. By creating a separate area for snacking and placing washrooms or port-a-potties and hand sanitizing stations nearby, you can maintain a food-free play area.

### **Scott Belair, CCPI, ICSTJ, B.Sc.**

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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 has extensive experience ranging from manufacturing and installation earlier in his career to promoting an auditing software program, performing safety audits, and leading training courses throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia.

- As summer approaches, the UV rays from the sun will help kill germs that may be present on play equipment.

## HOW TO ADVISE THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE PERILS OF GERMS AT OUTDOOR PUBLIC PLAYGROUNDS

Consider signage. Every playspace installed in Canada since 2003 is required to have a sign with the owner/operator's name and contact information in compliance with CSA Z614 Clause 16.1. Many playground owner/operators use this owner/operator signage to convey additional rules and information such as:

- Adult supervision is recommended
- Opening hours (for bylaw enforcement)
- Inspect play area before using the equipment
- No running, pushing, or shoving
- Do not use equipment in wet or snowy conditions
- 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**
- **Before using equipment, consult local health regulations concerning virus and/or disease transmission**

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 playground, contact your local playground equipment sales representative.



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