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MEDIA RELEASE

CHILD'S PLAY: MONITOR SAFETY STANDARDS, REPORT INJURIES

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THE risks of outdoor play for children are heavily outweighed by the benefits, and playground safety relies on detailed injury surveillance, according to the authors of Perspective published online today by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Dr Ruth Barker, director of the Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit and colleagues wrote that the recent case of a playground in north-western Sydney with a giant tube slide which caused a spate of injuries to both adult and child patrons and was then closed, was a case in point.

"With injuries described as 'horrific', the media questioned 'how the 30m long, 14m tall slide passed safety rules'," Barker and colleagues wrote.

"The 'safety rules' referred to in the media are set out in the Australian standard for playground safety (AS 4685 series — playground equipment and surfacing).

"When the standard was written, it is unclear whether a 30m long, 14m tall tube slide was in the minds of the technical committee. Long, totally enclosed tube slides expose the user to psychological effects such as impaired speed perception and dynamic biomechanical movements, creating an out-of-control sensation similar to that of an amusement park ride.

"Slide design to separate children of different ages does not necessarily separate the users and decrease the risk. We propose that Australia have a standard for adventure playgrounds that requires 'adventure rides' such as giant slides to be supervised with dispatch control.

"Such a standard could fill the gap between AS 4685 (playground equipment and surfacing series) and AS 3533 (amusement rides and device series)."

Monitoring the safety of playground equipment was important but only mandated in Victoria, Barker and colleagues wrote.

"Level 1 injury surveillance data are only mandated in Victoria as part of the Emergency Minimum Dataset collated by the Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit. This provides a brief textual description as well as coded field options including location type, injury mechanism and activity at the time of injury, and allows more meaningful statewide surveillance of injury trends due to different products or activities.

"Children need to engage in outdoor free play, ideally with a low risk to hazard ratio."

Dr Lisa Sharwood, injury epidemiologist with the University of Sydney and Australian Standards, said: "Mandating injury reporting standards with a rigorous process to independently review their application would enhance accountability under the current system.

"Ideally, the Victorian model should be replicated nationally, to inform injury researchers of emerging hazards. To better inform public safety strategies, we encourage doctors and parents to report detailed circumstances of avoidable injuries to relevant authorities."

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