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Canada Ready To Re-Open Its Playspaces?

As the varying provinces and territories in Canada struggle with when and how to re-open - what we do know is that COVID-19 spreads far more easily indoors than outdoors. So opening outdoor playgrounds is one of the more reasonable activities for a user to participate in when your jurisdiction, province or territory begins to re-open public facilities.

Some important points to make up front:

We **ARE NOT** advising on whether or not any playground owner/operator should open or close playgrounds.

We **ARE** suggesting how you might re-open playgrounds only when public health professionals advise it is appropriate to do so.

What we know:

- Most people with COVID-19 shows symptoms within the first 5-6 days
- 99% of people shows symptoms within 14 days (hence the rationale for the 14 day quarantine)
- COVID-19 typically lasts only a few hours on a majority of surfaces, but can last up to 3 days on some common playground surfaces such as plastics and stainless steel

The good news is that with most public playgrounds have not been not used or touched since late March (8+ weeks ago and counting) - so any potential presence of COVID-19 should be gone. The challenge will be how to keep surfaces clean of COVID-19 or other potential viruses, diseases, toxins, etc. as our public spaces begin to re-open.

Another consideration is that all of the untouched and unused equipment has likely not been inspected or maintained at normal intervals over the same above noted time frame. Therefore, an inspection and perhaps some maintenance will be required prior to re-opening.

Here are the minimum steps to be taken to re-open:

- 1) Inspect play equipment in accordance with your playground policy and/or CSA Z614:20 requirement.
- 2) Pay extra attention to moving parts such as: swings, links and fastening devices, bearing hangers, track rides and zip lines, etc. that may require lubrication or other steps prior to use.
- 3) Maintain all equipment as necessary.
- 4) Open equipment for use.

Here are some other reasonable steps you may wish to incorporate:

- Signage – maintain physical distancing (or social distancing) signage of 2.0-meters + (or whatever distance your jurisdiction is recommending).

- Signage – take down any ‘closed’ signage, as well as remove any caution tape, temporary fence, etc.
- Signage – warn any users (users, parents, caregivers, etc.) to use good hygienic practices on their person and on the equipment both before and after use (sanitize face, hands, body, etc.) and equipment as appropriate.
- Signage – yes, let’s warn against COVID-19, but also include a ‘general warning’ against all hazards (let’s not forget general liability also!).
- Signage – Ensure signage is free of hazards and will not cause injury (after all, it is not part of the play equipment)

Here are some steps you may wish to take if you decide to, OR, are directed to sanitize equipment:

- Read the playground manufacturer’s instruction manual first. This will likely 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.
- Focus sanitizing efforts on more frequently used surfaces such as: climber rungs, swings seats and chains, handrails and hand supports, etc.
- 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.
- 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. 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.
- Have a cleaning procedure spelled out so all employees are using the same procedure.
- **It should also be noted that commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19. So there is no need to use harsh chemicals.**
- Use only approved hard-surface disinfectants that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms the product is approved and safe for use in Canada.
- The Government of Canada is recommending the following diluted bleach mixture (as being effective against COVID-19): Diluted bleach prepared according to the instructions on the label, OR, in a ratio of:
 - 4 teaspoons (20 mL) per litre (1000 mL)

- Visit this link for more information: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19.html>
- 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.
- Make sure any staff operating a washer or sprayer is wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to avoid contaminated water droplets.
- 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 owner's 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.

Hopefully by working together to keep our playgrounds and recreational facilities clean we can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and/or other communicable diseases, virus, etc. If you have any questions about this article or how to clean and sanitize your specific playground, other than what is stated above, you should contact your local playground equipment 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.