

Preventing Outdoor Ball Strike Injury

Use this guide as a Basket of Considerations that can be adapted to your board's policies, physical environment, and supervision practices to help improve safety.

By the Numbers



Between the 2020-21 and 2024-25 school years, there were **6,978 approved head injuries** among **30,067 total approved incidents**, representing approximately **23% of all approved incidents**.



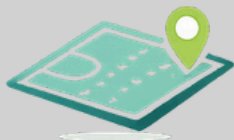
In 2024-25, **Struck By/Against incidents accounted for 54.1% of all head injury incidents**. Nearly **40% of these incidents were the result of ball strikes**.



Over the past 10 years, head injuries have accounted for almost half of all incident-related costs across Ontario school boards.

1

Create Physical Activity Zones



Designated activity areas can help reduce conflicts between activities and improve supervision.

Consider:

- Designating specific areas for particular activities
- Locating activity zones so they do not conflict with adjacent play areas
- Clearly marking boundaries using safety cones, chalk, paint, or other visual indicators
- Adjusting activities as conditions change. For example, when field closures require students to use tarmac areas, consider temporarily restricting or eliminating ball play.

2

Playground Mapping



Playground mapping builds on the concept of activity zones by intentionally organizing outdoor space.

A playground map can:

- Support safe activity placement
- Improve supervision planning
- Promote shared access to outdoor spaces
- Help ensure activities occur in locations that best support safety and visibility

The playground map can also serve as a valuable supervision tool.

3

Supervisor Equipment



Providing supervisors with appropriate equipment can support effective supervision and response.

Recommended equipment may include:

- A whistle or other signaling device
- A two-way radio
- A high-visibility vest
- Winter traction aids during icy conditions



Students need to understand what is expected of them during recess and outdoor play.

Consider:

- Including outdoor play safety expectations in student handbooks or agendas
- Establishing a recess Code of Conduct
- Defining reasonable expectations for throwing and kicking activities
- Establishing an auditory or visual signal (e.g., two whistle blasts) that immediately stops play when a supervisor needs to intervene

There are many effective approaches to establishing playground expectations. Boards are encouraged to review the Resources list on the final page and adopt practices that best align with their needs.



Just as students require clear expectations, supervisors need a clear understanding of their role.

Active supervision involves:

- Moving continuously throughout the yard
- Avoiding prolonged periods in a single location
- Continuously scanning with both eyes and ears
- Maintaining strong situational awareness
- Identifying and addressing concerns before incidents occur

Active supervision, combined with clear student expectations, helps create a safer environment for both students and staff.

How It Works Together



Intentional Planning

Zones and planning create structure.



Stronger Supervision

Clear organization and the right tools to support supervisors.



Fewer Risks

Reduced conflicts and better visibility lower the chance of injury.



Safer Schools

A proactive approach protects students and staff



Small, intentional changes can lead to safer play, stronger supervision, and healthier school communities.

Acknowledgements



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1. Parachute Canada
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Resources



1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and SHAPE America — *Strategies for Recess in Schools*
2. National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety — *Active Supervision*
3. Minnesota Department of Education — *Recess Moves! A Toolkit for Quality Recess*
4. Center for Inclusive Child Care — *Active Supervision Outside*

