



# NORTHERN LIGHTS SCHOOL DIVISION No. 113

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## NLSD#113 Playground Closures Due to COVID-19

Northern Lights School Division #113 and the **Canadian Playground Safety Institute** is not recommending the use of any playground equipment during the COVID-19 crisis, which includes equipment within our school playgrounds. Playground equipment will not be sanitized. Use of playground equipment is at your own risk.

### GermS at the Playground in a COVID-19 World

Chances are if a playground is teeming with children, it's also teeming with germs. COVID-19 is the most recent challenge in the transfer of germs and/or disease amongst children in a play environment.

After all, before children touch play equipment (and one another), kids have 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. And toddlers clad in leaky diapers may sit on spring toys, slides, or swings. The end result: Many playgrounds contain some pretty nasty types of germs – COVID-19 could now possibly be one of many germs that may be present on a common surface such as a playground component.

### The Reality

**In most outdoor play spaces, 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. Germs can spread across the playground, as small hands grasp the swing chain, use the hand grips at the monkey bars, and push off from the slide. It turns out, the playground may be many times more germ-infested than virtually any surface in your home. In addition to the germs already at the playground, already sick children also in attendance at the local park can present even more of a health threat to a child.

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, coronaviruses and heaven forbid the current COVID-19 (a type of coronavirus) are just a few of the common bacterium and viruses that can be found in a public setting such as a play space.

Owner/operators of playgrounds and play spaces do face the challenge of keeping surfaces clean without creating a hazard for users through barriers, hazardous chemicals and without damaging equipment and surfacing during cleaning.

As we talk about '**social distancing**' – it is the opinion of the Canadian Playground Safety Institute that playground equipment at your local park or school is just as safe (or dangerous) today as it was last month or last year (meaning the selection of components on site has not changed the situation). The biggest challenge in today's COVID-19 world is that play spaces have historically represented social gathering places. Seemingly the biggest risk is not the equipment, but rather the biggest risk is other users or other people spreading COVID-19 while at a public venue (such as a local park or playground).

The science of COVID-19 is still quite preliminary, and experts do not actually know how readily contaminated surfaces cause infection. What experts do know is 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 'common surface spreading' has not yet been documented.