

# Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Playgrounds

Playgrounds vary widely on school grounds, but even the newest materials can house pests if ignored. Have IPM protocols in place before pest interactions occur.

## Education

1. Educate administrators, contractors, other municipal departments responsible for maintaining school grounds, staff and students about the merits of utilizing IPM and any related regulations on the use of pesticides and/or IPM.
2. Educate facility and grounds managers and custodial staff contractors, other municipal departments responsible for maintaining school grounds, on IPM management strategies for playgrounds.
3. Educate teachers and custodians on responding to pest issues in the playground, including; noticing and reporting signs of pests, and response to impacts to students from playground pests.
4. Educate the community about your school's IPM program and the role everyone plays in preventing and safely addressing pest issues. Newsletters, public meetings, and/or informative signage can be helpful.
5. Educate students about how to reduce their risk of encountering ticks and stinging insects.

## Insects, Tick and Rodent Prevention and Planning

1. Keep all fences, structures and equipment in good repair. Seal holes and gaps that allow yellowjackets to build nests in the ground or in hollow cavities in and under structures, fences and equipment. Cover drain and "weep" holes with porous filler or screening. Replace missing endcaps on hollow fencing and playground equipment. Remove unused equipment and building materials.
2. Inspect equipment, electrical boxes, ramps, eaves, regularly during warmer weather and remove stinging insect nests located near areas of human activity.
3. Grade, fill, clean, drain and/or maintain structures, equipment, and grounds to eliminate sources of standing water which may include playground structures, gutters and downspouts, bird baths, tires, and low areas of ground.
4. Manage trash, compost and recycled waste properly. Keep dumpsters clean, closed and well away from playground. Keep waste receptacles clean, covered and emptied daily. Ensure any compost piles or bins are properly managed to prevent attracting pests.
5. If necessary, install spikes or netting to prevent bird roosting in play areas. Accumulations of bird excrement can present a human health risk.
6. Select non-fruiting trees and shrubs. Foraging yellowjackets are often attracted to decaying fruit dropping from ornamental and edible fruiting trees and shrubs.
7. Keep lawn areas mown at 3-4" height. In play areas, mow more often if necessary to remove flowers from the lawn, such as clover, if stinging insects are active.

8. Inspect mulch and any lumber used as borders for mouse or vole nesting, as small rodents are important parts of blacklegged tick life cycle. Voids in wood also make desirable nesting areas for ground wasps such as yellowjackets.
9. Playgrounds are best placed in sunny locations away from woody areas.
10. Avoid placing bird feeders near areas where students congregate, as they increase the incidents of rodents.

## Insect and Tick Response

1. Report pest sightings.
2. Remove students if the pest poses a hazard. Block access to hazardous areas until the situation is resolved.
3. Remove pest habitat, sources of food and water, and breeding areas where possible.
4. If needed, work with a pest company to identify the pest, and address the issue.

## Weed Prevention and Planning

1. Determine threshold for weed tolerance in the playground.
2. Establish a management plan for long-term success based on thresholds and treatment options.
3. Reduce sunlight on bare soil by using playground-approved mulch. Determine what regulations require in your state for the types and depth of mulch required. At a minimum, install a minimum of a 4" layer on soil, to prevent grassy and broadleaf weed emergence.

## Weed Response

1. Understand the nature of the weed: What is its life cycle? How does it spread? Why does it favor this type of site?
2. Deal with emerged weeds when they are small and less established.
3. Remove weeds by hand when possible.
4. Remove the complete plant and root when weeding. Cautiously removing poison ivy this way when the plant is a good preventative. Older, established plants may require professional intervention that follows your district's pesticide use policy.