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IAEM advice to parents on prevention of child trampoline injuries

Trampolines have become a popular piece of recreational apparatus in Ireland in recent years. The use of garden trampolines has become a means of ensuring that children have fun but also keep fit. However, injuries associated with trampolines in children have also become increasingly frequent and many victims of such injuries present to Emergency Departments (EDs), particularly during the summer.

International evidence, particularly from North America and Australia, suggests that the number of trampoline-associated injuries has doubled in the past decade. Worldwide, there have been a number of deaths associated with trampoline use, mainly from head and high spinal cord injuries.

Whilst the total current number of paediatric trampoline-associated injuries presenting to Irish EDs is not recorded nationally, anecdotally there has been an increasing number of children presenting to Irish EDs in recent years. It is estimated that for every child admitted to hospital, a further 12 are seen and treated in the ED without the need for orthopaedic follow-up. A study conducted at the Orthopaedic Department of Waterford Regional Hospital over a 6 month period in 2005, identified injuries to 88 children sustained from trampoline use which required orthopaedic involvement. 40% of these children required surgery. The main injuries described were fractures to the upper limbs (69%). Most falls (60%) occurred while on the bed of the trampoline, not as a result of a fall off the trampoline and were entirely preventable. Of note, in 35% of cases the injury was related to the presence of others on the trampoline. The injured child was supervised by an adult in only 40% of cases.

Adults may also sustain or cause trampoline-related injuries often in the context of a party when alcohol has been consumed. Because of deaths and serious injuries in the USA, the American Academy of Paediatrics recommends that trampolines not be bought for children and that parents do not allow their children use a trampoline elsewhere. Indeed, the American Medical Association recommends that children not use trampolines, even with adult supervision.

As trampoline use is ubiquitous in Ireland, IAEM recommends the following minimum safety precautions to make their use safer:

- only one child at a time should use a trampoline;
- children should be supervised by an adult at all times while using a trampoline;
- trampolines should be surrounded by appropriate safety netting to stop both ingress and falls from the trampoline;
- a trampoline should never be used while under the influence of alcohol.

Following these precautions will reduce, although not eliminate, injuries that otherwise might spoil a child and family's enjoyment of this common recreational activity.

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