

Recreational trampoline parks in BC: Safety and upcoming regulation

Tampoline parks, which are recreational facilities not affiliated with formal gymnastics training programs, have increased in popularity dramatically in recent years. When the first park opened in Canada in 2011, it was one of 40 worldwide; in 2017, there were over 1000 parks worldwide and 50 million users in North America.¹

The growing popularity of these parks has been matched by growing concern about their safety, spurred by high-profile, serious injuries that have occurred. In 2017, for example, an Edmonton teenager became paralyzed following a neck injury in a trampoline park, and in 2018, a 46-year-old man died after being injured while using a park in Richmond, BC. Seven months later, at the same Richmond park, a toddler fell through a trampoline and onto a concrete surface underneath.²

While there is anecdotal evidence of an increase in visits to BC emergency rooms involving injuries sustained at trampoline parks, there are no BC-specific surveillance data of the topic. National surveillance databases of hospital-treated injuries, however, show that trampoline park injuries have increased significantly since 2012.³ These included fractures, dislocations, traumatic brain injuries, and rare spinal injuries. Lower extremity injuries, more stunt-based injuries, and sprains were also more likely compared to injuries sustained on backyard trampolines.

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These injuries have focused attention on the fact that trampoline parks are unregulated in BC and all other Canadian provinces. While operators may voluntarily join the International Association of Trampoline Parks, which requires members to pledge to meet the organization's safety standards, as of August 2019, only four BC operators are listed as members.⁴ In response to this lack of oversight, regional health authorities have been advocating for Technical Safety BC, the independent provincial body that oversees the safety of rollercoasters, zip-lines, waterslides, and other amusement devices, to be empowered

to also regulate trampoline parks under the Safety Standards Act. Led by the municipality of Richmond, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities passed a resolution expressing a similar position in the fall of 2018.

These efforts have had an impact. Technical Safety BC has, over the past months, undertaken a review of the risk of injury at trampoline parks and options for their regulation. During the public engagement phase of this review, they heard strong and consistent feedback from the public that regulation was desired,⁵ and they have recently recommended to the provincial government that the relevant regulations be amended to require oversight of trampoline parks.

The BC government has signalled general support for this recommendation.⁶ However, it is unclear when or how vigorously the needed amendments will be pursued, and there are significant details that remain to be resolved before regulation could begin. Following their

consultation, for example, Technical Safety BC highlighted topics such as the safety of flips, the safety of foam pits, and the degree of training required for staff that generated very different responses among operators.⁵ In particular, the consultation identified differences between trampoline facilities associated with formal training programs and strictly recreational facilities. The former are regulated by Gymnastics BC, which imposes restrictions based on coaching, supervision, first-aid training, and other safety considerations. How to differentiate these types of trampoline facilities has not yet been addressed by Technical Safety BC.

For the time being, physicians should be aware of the risks of trampoline parks as well as guidance from the Canadian Paediatrics Association, which states that trampolines put children at risk of injury, and children and their parents should be counseled about this risk and advised not to use trampolines. This guidance was

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formally updated in 2013 and relates primarily to home trampoline use, but the association's current position is that trampoline parks should not be considered to be safer than home trampolines.⁷

Doctors of BC will continue to monitor injury prevention guidance on this topic as well as changes in trampoline park regulation and will update members as needed. ■

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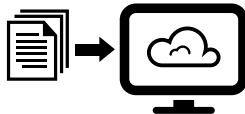
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