

Bouncy castles

There is little Irish research on injuries sustained on bouncy castles, despite the increased use and growing number of injuries presented to hospital Emergency Departments. UK Government statistics indicate that annually there are approximately 10,000 accidents involving bouncy castles which result in injuries to children. Some 4,000 were caused by bouncy castles being used at home, and 6,000 at locations away from the home.

Many of the injuries were serious, including broken bones and severe lacerations. Most of the injuries are caused by children bouncing off the inflatable onto the ground, being hit by other children or just falling awkwardly. Many of these accidents could be avoided by effective adult supervision. These notes are intended to give some guidance to those proposing to hire inflatable bouncy castles as part of a fundraising event, a fete or a private function such as a birthday party.

The equipment should be hired from reputable hire companies, and wherever possible, set up, operated and supervised by the hire company's own staff. This is particularly important if substantial numbers of children are likely to be present.

Before hiring

Before hiring a bouncy castle, ensure that the hire company: fully complies with the safe use and operation of play inflatables. A useful guidance tool is issued by the Inflatable Play Inspector Scheme in the UK. This guidance can be downloaded from www.pipa.org.uk

- ❖ employees are suitably experienced and well-trained adult personnel, where the company is responsible for the setting up, operation and supervision of the bouncy castle
- ❖ provides evidence of a current public liability insurance policy with a limit of indemnity of at least €1.3 million. This insurance is to cover the liability of the hire company. It is unlikely to extend to cover the hirer of the equipment.

Self operation

If you are to operate the bouncy castle, in addition to items 1 and 3 below, ensure that you are provided with written instructions about the safe setting up, operation and supervision of the equipment, and that the name and address of the manufacturer or supplier is clearly marked upon it.

Safety instructions

The safety instructions should include the following points:

1. Children should not be allowed to use the bouncy castle if there is a high wind or in wet weather (inflatables can flip over, and slippery surfaces may cause injury)
2. The castle must be adequately secured to the ground
3. The castle should not be positioned close to any structures or hazards that could injure users who hit them
4. Soft matting covering hard surfaces must be placed adjacent to the front or open sides
5. There must be responsible adult supervision, paying close attention to the children at play at all times during its use
6. The number of children using the bouncy castle must be limited to the number recommended in the hire
7. company's safety instructions. There must be no overcrowding
8. A rota system for different age or size groups should be operated, together with the observance of any age limit of users. (It is suggested that adults are not permitted to use the equipment)
9. All children must be made to remove footwear, hard or sharp objects such as jewellery, buckles, pens and other similar pocket contents. Eating while bouncing or performing acrobatics must not be allowed