

# 'Use at your own risk:' city opens playgrounds, health unit recommends common sense

*Sarah Sobanski*

Kawartha Lakes kids can get back to the monkey bars, but some parents may have concerns the city won't be sanitizing them regularly.

The city's 55 playgrounds are open as the province loosens pandemic measures for Stage 3 reopening.

Mayor Andy Letham has said the city will leave playground play during pandemic times to the discretion of parents. The municipality won't be enforcing any COVID-19 restrictions.

"They'll be putting up additional signage over the next week, which is basically, 'Use at your own risk,'" Letham said.

"We don't have the staff. We're not obligated under the opening to clean them on a regular basis. It will just be up to the parents to use their best judgement with their kids playing on these play structures moving forward."

Letham said closed signage was coming down and playgrounds were being inspected for opening July 17. They've been roped off and stamped with COVID-19 warnings for the duration of the pandemic.

Richard Ovcharovich, manager of health protection for Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health, said Stage 3 guidelines don't require continued cleaning of outdoor equipment. Playgrounds opening means the onus is on parents to "play it safe."

"With outdoor playgrounds and play structures being open to the public again under Stage 3, it's likely very welcome news for families with young children," he said "But as always, it's important to temper enthusiasm with precaution to help everyone stay safe during COVID-19."

Ovcharovich noted there are other germs parents should watch out for at play sites — not just virus germs. Bird droppings, for example, should also make parents think to have their children washing their hands regularly.

"The health unit's recommendation is to continue to use common sense and adhere to the public health messaging on COVID-19 when playing outdoors," he said.

Recommendations include keeping children home if they are sick, teaching them proper sneezing and coughing etiquette, washing hands after playing, following signage, avoiding large gatherings and encouraging kids to physically distance with friends outside of their family social bubble.

“Playgrounds are important spaces for being active and having fun,” Ovcharovich added. “With a few precautions and common sense, everyone can enjoy the outdoors – and reduce their risk of COVID-19.”

[Parents should note pandemic protocols are also being removed from splash pads as of Aug. 4.](#)

Fencing meant to help enforce gathering restrictions is being removed and the city won't be shutting down splash pads every few hours for additional cleaning. That said, splash pads will still be kept up to non-pandemic public health standards.