

Children at risk of hat hangings

By Gemma Jones

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AN alarming number of children are nearly being hanged by the cords in school hats when they fall from playground equipment.

At least five kindergarten-aged children have nearly died in the past five months in New South Wales, prompting a child safety expert to call for a review.

Kidsafe NSW Playground safety adviser Margaret Cavanagh has found few parents are aware of the danger.

In the US, 75 children have died from clothing cord injuries in seven years and Ms Cavanagh said it is only a matter of time before a child dies in Australia.

She has shocking photographs which show burn marks around a seven-year-old girl's neck.

Georgia Tierney, of Perth, was choked by her school hat cord from monkey bars in the school playground earlier this year and was lucky to survive.

"If she had been there any longer it is quite possible she could have been garrotted," Ms Cavanagh said.

All school students are required to wear a hat while playing, with schools across the state choosing broad brimmed hats with cords.

Ms Cavanagh said schools needed to urgently review uniforms to ensure they supply hats which are safe.

"We would like to see a review of the styles of hats and fixings associated with those hats," she said.

A company in Sydney is working on a release mechanism for school hats and elastic straps are also safer.

Georgia Tierney's mother, Leah, is fighting a campaign in Western Australia to have cords banned on school hats, or at least made safer.

"It could be so easy to make the hats safer, we are talking about children's lives," she said.

Ms Cavanagh is amazed a simple life-saving release device is not already in use and is pleased hat makers are beginning to see the need for one.

St Ives Park Primary School, in Sydney's north, is one school shunning hats with cords with principal Janet King also banning necklaces.

"Our brimmed hats don't have cords on which children could get caught when they are playing," Ms King said.