

Soccer-net injuries raise fears

Municipalities are urged to make sure goalposts at parks are securely anchored, after three children are hurt in a series of accidents.

JONATHON GATEHOUSE
The Gazette

A Joliette boy remains in a coma in Montreal Children's Hospital after his head was crushed Tuesday night by a falling set of soccer goalposts.

Patrick Rivest, 9, and two young friends were playing in a municipal park near his home about 8 p.m. when the accident occurred. The boy was swinging from the crossbar of the 100-kilogram soccer net when it suddenly tipped forward, fracturing his skull and pinning him to the ground.

He was brought to a local hospital and later transferred to the Children's where he is in extremely critical condi-

tion. A hospital spokesman rated the boy's chances of survival as slim.

Tuesday's accident was the sixth injury involving toppling goalposts in the Montreal area in the past year.

An 11-year-old Rivière des Prairies boy suffered severe head injuries March 1 when an indoor soccer net he was swinging on fell over. Another 11-year-old boy from Le Gardeur fractured his skull in a similar incident April 20.

The accidents have raised questions about the safety of interior and exterior goalposts, and child-injury specialists warn schools, municipalities and sporting associations to make sure the metal frames are firmly secured.

Debbie Friedman, assistant program director of head and spinal cord trauma at the Children's, said the message to parents and children is clear:

"You don't need 100 head injuries to understand this is serious," she said.

"Our concern is that if people are going to have this equipment out and ac-

cessible, that they follow regulations and make sure it's well maintained."

Friedman said it's next to impossible to prevent children from playing on the goalposts, so the responsibility rests with adults to ensure the nets are safe. She said head injuries are one of the leading causes of death and disability in children, and that her hospital treats more than 1,400 of them a year.

Joliette city officials did not return *The Gazette's* calls yesterday, but published reports suggested the 75-centimetre-long iron rods that fastened the net in place had been removed by vandals before Tuesday's accident.

Françoise Cormier, a superintendent for Montreal's parks and recreation department, said the city inspected all its soccer goals and warned area school boards and athletic associations to do the same, after the March 1 accident in Rivière des Prairies.

Cormier said the city owns two types of exterior soccer nets: specially de-

signed portable goals that are so heavily weighted in the back that it takes several adults to move or tip them over, and larger permanent posts that are cemented in place.

She said there are no longer any goalposts like the ones involved in the Joliette accident in Montreal parks.

While parents might be alarmed by the recent concentration of soccer-net accidents, Health Canada statistics suggest they are not indicative of a larger safety problem. A national database that tracks child injuries via information supplied by the country's 16 children's hospitals shows only seven such incidents since 1990, not including the most recent accidents.

Margaret Herbert, a Health Canada official, said toppling nets appear to be a potential problem but not a great cause for concern. "It's a relatively small number of cases," she said. "The severity of the injuries is a little higher than average, but not alarmingly so."