

Letter from Chief Medical Health Officer



Office of the Chief
Medical Health Officer

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March 24, 2016

Mr. Malcolm Bromley
General Manager,
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
2099 Beach Avenue
Vancouver, British Columbia
Canada V6G 1Z4

Dear Mr. Bromley,

Re: Synthetic Turf

I am writing in response to your letter dated February 26, 2016. In the letter you asked for updated Public Health recommendations regarding synthetic turf fields. My staff recently reviewed the existing evidence with respect to synthetic turf and health risks, particularly given the recent public interest about the use of recycled crumb rubber for these turfs. We came to the following conclusions and recommendations in light of current information:

- Serious health risks, including cancer, are not increased from playing on synthetic turf fields with crumb rubber infill
- There may be more burns, cuts and scrapes, and ankle injuries from playing on synthetic turf compared to natural turf
- On hot days, synthetic turf can get extremely hot which may cause heat related symptoms in players
- There is no public health reason for discontinuing the use of synthetic turfs

There are potential public health benefits associated with synthetic turf fields. Synthetic turf provides more total available playing hours than natural fields, as it can be used all year round in all-weather situations. This could increase community access and opportunities for physical activity. This can be very important since most of the residents in our region, including children, do not achieve the daily recommended levels of physical activity.

In our review, we also became aware however of the possibility that synthetic turfs may act like urban heat islands in the summer. While this evidence comes from places that typically have hotter summers than Vancouver, and there is no local data, it is something the Board may consider as our region experiences climate change.

Given the present knowledge, we recommend the following to address the potential concerns associated with synthetic turf, as well as to minimize exposure to the crumb rubber and other components of the synthetic turf:

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1. For players (or for parents to monitor)

- Stay well hydrated on hot days and stay in the shade when possible to reduce the risk of heat related illness
- Properly clean any skin wounds or abrasions, including removing any pieces of crumb rubber, and seek appropriate treatment when necessary
- Wash hands and shower after playing on synthetic turf
- Do not eat on synthetic turf
- Remove crumb rubber pellets as much as possible from shoes, socks and uniforms after playing

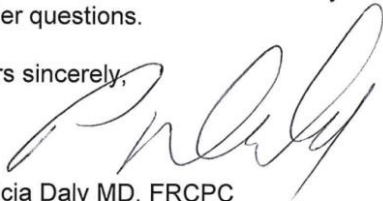
2. For Sports Organizations, Facility Operators, Spectators, Families

- Ensure vegetation and tree canopy are maximized when landscaping areas surrounding synthetic turf fields
- On extremely hot days, water the synthetic turf to reduce the temperature of the playing field
- Provide a shaded area for players on hot days
- Ensure players and spectators have easy access to drinking water
- Maintain proper ventilation for indoor fields
- Purchase new turf with the lowest lead content available on the market
- Ensure small children, either players or spectators, do not eat pieces of the synthetic turf or crumb rubber
- Regularly inspect, maintain, repair and replace synthetic turf fields as they show wear and damage and in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations.

We are aware that the State of California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) is currently conducting additional synthetic turf studies to supplement previous OEHHA studies conducted in 2007 and 2010. Recently the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Centers for Disease Control, and Consumer Product Safety Commission also launched a joint study on synthetic turfs. It is expected some results from these ongoing studies will be released by the end of 2016. Vancouver Coastal Health will continue to monitor and review the new scientific evidence as they become available.

I hope this information is useful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us again if you have further questions.

Yours sincerely,



Patricia Daly MD, FRCPC
Vice-President, Public Health and Chief Medical Health Officer
Vancouver Coastal Health

CC: Randy Ash, Manager Health Protection, Healthy Built Environment, Health Protection,
Vancouver Coastal Health

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