

March 7, 2023

Mr. Nalon Smith  
Planner II, Planning, Policy and Environment  
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation  
2099 Beach Ave  
Vancouver, BC V6G 1Z4

Dear Mr. Smith,

**RE: Consultation, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation *Sport Field Strategy***

On behalf of the Office of the Chief Medical Health Officer with Vancouver Coastal Health, I am writing in regard to the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation's comprehensive city-wide strategy to create and refresh the City of Vancouver's sports fields over the next ten years. We applaud the City's effort in planning for and allocating spaces that members of the general public can use for recreation, physical activity and social connection.

As the *Sport Field Strategy* plans on including a review of natural and synthetic turf fields, our public health program has been consulted on related health questions. In light of current scientific evidence, we would like to highlight the following:

- Serious health risks, including cancer, are not known to be increased due to activities on synthetic turf fields with crumb rubber infill.
- Some research suggests that there may be more burns, cuts and scrapes, and ankle injuries from playing on synthetic turf fields compared to natural fields.
- On hot days, temperatures in areas of synthetic turf may be elevated and cause heat-related symptoms in players.
- In summary, at this time there is not a strong public health rationale to discontinue the use of synthetic turf fields.

There are potential public health benefits associated with areas for sport and play, including synthetic turf fields. Synthetic fields may provide more field time than natural fields, as they can generally be used year-round in varied weather conditions, which in turn can support increased access and opportunities for use. This is noteworthy at a time when health data shows that most people in communities across Canada, including children, do not experience recommended levels of physical activity. Another key health benefit of year-round sport fields is the increased opportunities for community activities that promote social connection among residents. Evidence for the many health benefits of social connection is well established, and physical environments supporting social connection are valuable amenities for public health.

Given present knowledge, the following are reasonable steps to address potential concerns associated with synthetic turf fields, including exposure to crumb rubber and other components of the synthetic turf:

**1. For players and spectators:**

- To reduce the risk of heat-related illnesses, stay well hydrated during activity and seek shade when possible.

- Properly clean any skin abrasions or other wounds, and seek appropriate treatment when necessary.
- Ensure that small children do not ingest pieces of synthetic turf or crumb rubber.
- Do not place food products directly on synthetic turf.

**2. For sports organizations and facility operators:**

- Support maximizing tree canopy and other shade-providing elements when planning and landscaping areas surrounding synthetic turf fields.
- Ensure that players and spectators have easy access to drinking water.
- Maintain proper ventilation for indoor fields.
- Regularly inspect, maintain, repair and replace synthetic turf fields when they show wear and damage, and in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations.
- Provide shaded areas for players on hot days.
- On very hot days, watering the synthetic turf may help to reduce the temperature of the playing field.

Thank you for consulting with our public health program on the *Sport Field Strategy*. We look forward to continued collaboration on protecting and promoting population health through park spaces and program. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



**Dr. Michael Schwandt**  
Medical Health Officer  
Vancouver Coastal Health