

Colorado Youth Soccer
Risk Management
Lead Levels of Synthetic Turf Not Harmful

National headlines and concerns were ignited regarding action by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services during spring of 2008 regarding the potential of elevated lead levels found in several synthetic-turf fields in their state. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) was requested to further evaluate the situation. Colorado Youth Soccer has been following the status of that evaluation.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) staff released their evaluation on July 30, 2008 which concludes that young children are not at risk from exposure to lead in these fields. See cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerelease/prhtml08/08348 for the release. CPSC staff stated that their evaluation showed that newer fields had no lead or generally had the lowest lead levels. Although small amounts of lead were detected on the surface of some older fields, none of these tested fields released amounts of lead that would be harmful to children.

CPSC added that lead is present in the pigments of some synthetic turf products to give the turf its various colors. CPSC staff did recognize that some conditions such as age, weathering, exposure to sunlight, and wear and tear might change the amount of lead that could be released from the turf. As turf is used during athletics or play and exposed over time to sunlight, heat and other weather conditions, the surface of the turf may start to become worn and small particles of the lead-containing synthetic grass fibers might be released. CPSC considered in their evaluation that particles on a child's hand transferred to his/her mouth would be the most likely route of exposure and determined young children would not be at risk.

Although this evaluation found no harmful lead levels, CPSC staff is asking that voluntary standards be developed for synthetic turf to preclude the use of lead in future products. This action is being taken proactively to address any future production of synthetic turf and to set a standard for any new entrants to the market to follow. The Synthetic Turf Council is working with CPSC to develop voluntary long-term objectives of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008 (H.R. 4040).

As an overall guideline, CPSC staff recommends players and spectators wash their hands after training or games, especially before eating regardless of the type of field they are playing on. What we forget is that natural grass can contain fertilizers, insecticides and other "non-natural" characteristics.