

FAQs: Synthetic Turf Use in Arlington

What is synthetic turf? Are there synthetic turf fields in Arlington?

- Synthetic turf is a grass-like surface material made of synthetic fibers that replicates natural grass. It is commonly used in athletic fields and playgrounds around the country.
- Arlington County has 17 synthetic turf fields. None of these fields use styrene butadiene rubber (SBR) made from recycled tires. Fourteen (14) of these fields use ethylene propylene diene monomer (EPDM) as the infill. EPDM is a synthetic rubber manufactured for the purpose of synthetic turf infill. The other three fields use an organic infill. These fields can be found at the stadium field at Washington-Liberty High School and the two fields at Williamsburg Middle School. Although the organic infill is still in a testing phase, the early response from users and maintenance personnel is extremely positive and plans are to use organic infills in future field replacements.
- Arlington County has three playgrounds with synthetic turf surfacing; none of these turfs use an infill.

Why does Arlington use synthetic turf?

Synthetic turf fields have many advantages:

- Synthetic turf has a uniform and level playing surface that can be used all year round offering a high quality of play.
- Synthetic turf fields do not need to be mowed, watered or fertilized.
- Synthetic turf offers enhanced accessibility to more teams and greater play due to the increased play time and all-weather surfacing.

What health concerns have been raised about synthetic turf fields?

Concerns about synthetic turf fields include:

- There have been concerns about the safety of playing on synthetic turf. However, on April 16, 2024, the Environmental Protection Agency released a multi-agency research report on synthetic turf and did not note any significant differences between synthetic fields and natural grass fields. The EPA report also cited studies from the Netherlands National Institute for Health and Environment, the European Chemicals Agency and the National Toxicology Program where those studies found “risk to health being virtually negligible, no reason to advise against playing on synthetic turf fields, and no evidence of toxicity found”, respectively.
- The Northern Virginia Health Directors and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) have found no evidence of increased pediatric cancer incidence in

Northern Virginia compared to the entire Commonwealth of Virginia and to the United States as a whole from playing on synthetic turf.

- Some synthetic turf surfaces can give off more heat. This increases the need for athletes to stay hydrated to prevent heat-related illness. However, fields with organic infills will have field surface temperatures at or near the ambient air temperature and do not create a heat island effect that synthetic fields with other types of infill may create.
- Arlington County continues to monitor studies of synthetic turf infills and seek guidance from national public health agencies on selection of infills and potential health risks.

What happens to old synthetic turf fields when the turf is replaced?

- While many communities allow old synthetic turf materials to be taken to local landfills, Arlington County requires contractors to recycle or reuse the old materials. Contractors are explicitly forbidden to take the old materials to a landfill.
- At the end of the project, contractors are required to provide proof that the synthetic turf materials were recycled or reused. This is a condition for final payment.
- As Arlington County continues to use organic infill materials, this material can be used as landscape mulch. The material is 100% organic, biodegradable and good for plants.

How can I keep myself or my child healthy while playing on synthetic turf?

Keep yourself healthy by taking the same steps you use when playing on natural grass:

- Stay hydrated, especially in the summer. Rest if you feel dizzy or too warm and remember to take breaks in play.
- Clean any scrapes as quickly as possible. Cover any scrapes, burns, or open wounds before playing.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds after playing on synthetic turf. Showering after play is also recommended.
- Do not eat while on the synthetic turf.
- Wear athletic shoes while playing on the synthetic turf. Do not play in bare feet.

Where can I go for additional information?

Contact Arlington County Department of Parks and Recreation at dpr@arlingtonva.us or visit the websites below.

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