

Athletes and Pesticides

Pesticides (herbicides, insecticides and fungicides) are commonly used on athletic facilities. The application of pesticides is usually at the discretion of the gardeners and/or facilities managers, and there are state and federal regulations that require certification of people who make pesticide application on school grounds. Because pesticides are registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), it is commonly assumed that they are completely safe. However, the EPA states that all pesticides are toxic to some degree, meaning that they can pose a risk. Further, the EPA urges that appropriate safety precautions be taken and that it should never be assumed that a pesticide is harmless. It is important that those responsible for pesticide treatment be knowledgeable about their use, restrictions, and warnings. Care should be taken, especially at facilities where contact sports are played.

Exposure to pesticides initially may cause no symptoms or symptoms not generally associated with pesticide exposure, including: sore throat, fever, headache, muscle and joint pains, muscle weakness, lack of coordination, nausea, rash and irregular menstruation. Although there is a need for definitive research to confirm the effects of pesticides on long term health, epidemiological studies have noted some possible associations, mainly in three areas: cancer, neurotoxic effects, and reproductive disorders. Because athletes and coaches spend several hours at athletic facilities, improper use of pesticides could increase the risk for health problems and might also hinder performance, especially in such individuals as the chemically sensitive and those with asthma. In view of the potential health risks associated with pesticide exposure, ACSM recommends that pesticides be used with caution in or around athletic facilities and recreational areas (e.g. urban parks, bike paths, walking and jogging trails). The EPA has published a booklet entitled "Pest Control in the School Environment: Adopting Integrated Pest Management." This booklet was developed to encourage and assist school officials in examining and improving their pest management practices. Integrated Pest Management is a pest control method that may be an alternative to scheduled sprayings in school grounds and other recreational facilities.

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