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STATEMENTS REGARDING SYNTHETIC TURF FIELD
AT THOMAS JEFFERSON PARK

Statement from Parks & Recreation Commissioner Adrian Benepe:

The Parks Department has temporarily closed a synthetic turf field at Thomas Jefferson Park in East Harlem after testing detected elevated lead levels. The source of the lead contamination is not known. The Parks Department is removing and replacing the turf at the field. The field will reopen when the replacement is complete.

The Parks Department has also tested other fields installed by the same turf vendor and none of those tests showed elevated lead levels. In an abundance of caution, the Parks Department is testing all 98 of its synthetic turf fields in consultation with the Health Department. The results will be made public when they are available.

The Parks Department remains committed to providing safe outdoor recreation space for New Yorkers. Synthetic turf fields offer many benefits: they can be used year-round and in all weather, enabling people to stay physically active. They require little maintenance and do not need fertilizers, pesticides or mowing.

Statement from Nancy Clark, Assistant Commissioner for Environmental Disease Prevention

Replacing the turf at Thomas Jefferson field will prevent potential lead exposure that could be harmful to young children. Health effects from previous exposure are unlikely. Field users would have had to ingest the crumb rubber to experience any significant risk. Very young children are most vulnerable to this type of exposure, whether from lead paint or other lead hazards, because they tend to put things in their mouths.

As a reminder, parents should have children wash their hands whenever they come in from playing outdoors. The Health Department will continue to work with the Parks Department to make sure New Yorkers have safe, accessible places to exercise.

The city's lead-poisoning rate has fallen dramatically in recent decades. East Harlem's rate of childhood lead poisoning is below the city average.

Background:

* Thomas Jefferson Park is part of a research project examining air samples collected at synthetic-turf fields. The Parks and Health Departments also sampled the actual turf at Jefferson Park. The turf samples showed elevated lead levels but soil samples collected nearby did not. Lead is not a component of crumb rubber, made from automobile and truck tires, and existing research has established no link between crumb rubber and lead. Parks will continue testing at the field in an effort to determine the source of the lead.

* The average level of lead detected at Thomas Jefferson was approximately 500 parts per million (ppm). The EPA standard for bare soil in children's play areas - 400 ppm - is intended to protect children under six who may ingest lead in soil during play. There is no applicable standard for lead in turf, so the Parks Department is acting on the EPA's bare soil in children's play areas guideline. The EPA standard for bare soil in non-play areas is 1,200 ppm.

* Earlier this year, two fields were closed in Newark, NJ, when tests found lead hazards in artificial turf carpet. The Health Department tested four New York City fields with the same type of carpet and did not identify lead hazards.

* Lead paint in older, poorly maintained housing is the most common source of lead poisoning in NYC.

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Contact: Jama Adams / Phil Abramson
1311

(212) 360-

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