

## PREPARING YOUR SYNTHETIC TURF FIELD FOR USE AFTER LOCKDOWN

With many countries starting to come out of lockdown, it is important that synthetic turf sports field facility operators start to think about introducing a re-commissioning plan for when their fields come back into use.

Many fields will have seen no activity for several months, and this may mean:

- Debris, including leaf litter, bird and animal droppings are lying on the surface
- Weeds have established in playing surfaces, particularly those which contain some form of infill, as a result of wind-blown seeds
- Infill within long pile (3G) fields may have become consolidated through the action of rain falling on the surface, and the pile on these carpets may have flattened due to a lack of brushing
- Moss and algae have established within the pile of hockey turf, especially if parts of the field have been lying in shade due to walls, buildings, or overhanging trees. Algae will make the surface slippery when wet and also cause the field to look dirty. Moss can also be slippery and will also restrict drainage. If left untreated, this can become an ongoing problem that is difficult to eradicate.

### LONG PILE SYNTHETIC TURF

On long pile synthetic turfs the surface should be given a deep groom. This is best undertaken using a large contra-rotating brush that lifts out the top few millimetres of the infill material and filters it before returning it to the surface, whilst also brushing the carpet pile in order to lift it. Where this is not possible, removal of debris using a drag mat or similar, followed by infill decompaction using metal tines will be necessary, followed by a through grooming of the surface.

### SHORT PILE SYNTHETIC TURF

On short pile surfaces (as used for hockey and tennis, etc) a wide, soft broom or a rubber-tined rake is ideal for removing vegetable debris and other rubbish. Better still, a mechanical leaf-sweeper or vacuum cleaner will greatly speed up the operation. The equipment should be well maintained and carefully operated to avoid contamination of, or physical damage to, the surface. Bird droppings can normally be washed away. Occasionally, large areas can be affected. When this occurs, power washing and disinfecting is recommended.

It is possible that the sand-infill on sand filled hockey turfs will have developed a crust due to rain falling on the surface with no agitation through use. This crust may be abrasive to players falling on the surface and might also impede drainage. A thorough grooming of the surface using a stiff mechanical brush will break up the crust, agitate the sand and return the surface to its optimum condition.

### REMOVAL BY HAND

If there are a small number of weeds, these can be removed by hand, ensuring the roots are extracted and not broken off, as some weeds are more prolific if they are simply cut off at surface level. If the weeds are deep-rooted, the roots may have penetrated the backing of the surface, meaning it is advisable to kill them off with an appropriate weed-killer. Localised areas of weed seedling infestations can be treated with domestic weed killers.

### ALGAE OR MOSS

If algae or moss have become established, it is important to treat the affected areas with a good proprietary moss killer or algaecide. More than one application may be required. Any good quality proprietary product should be satisfactory provided that it is not oil-based. In all cases, the treatment manufacturer application instructions should be closely followed. For severe problems, high-pressure cleaning equipment is available, but its use is a skilled process best undertaken by a specialist maintenance contractor.

**Whenever a chemical treatment is applied either directly or indirectly to synthetic turf, the manufacturer of the surface should be consulted in advance to ensure that the chemicals will not damage the surface or invalidate the manufacturer's warranty.**

### COVID 19

In some countries, concerns have been raised about the possibility of the Covid 19 virus contaminating the surface via bodily fluids from infected players. At present it is unclear if and for how long the virus might survive on a synthetic turf surface. What we do know is that synthetic turf is made from similar plastics to those used for packaging, and that some studies suggest the virus may survive on bags etc. for a number of days. However, the exact circumstances in which the virus can survive are still unclear.

It is advisable to consider both national guidance and government advice when deciding whether there is a risk of cross-contamination and if treatment of a field is required. There are a number of spray-applied disinfectants being marketed that will treat a variety of bacteria and viruses. The frequency of application differs from product to product and will depend on whether the field is subsequently watered (by irrigation or rain). Regular treatment is likely to be time consuming and expensive.

Ensuring players maintain good personal hygiene etiquette throughout play will help reduce any risk. As disinfectants are chemicals, it is, again, important that the manufacturer of the surface is consulted in advance to ensure that the chemicals will not damage the surface or invalidate the manufacturer's warranty.