

For Immediate Release
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Health Protection Program,
Vancouver Coastal Health Authority

**MEDICAL HEALTH OFFICER CAUTIONS PUBLIC NOT TO OVER-REACT TO
REPORTS OF ARSENIC RESIDUES FOUND IN LOCAL PLAYGROUNDS**

VANCOUVER, BC – The Chief Medical Health Officer for Vancouver Coastal Health Authority cautioned the public not to over-react to reports from Environmental Defense Canada of “high” arsenic levels found at the base of some playground structures in Vancouver. “While the study confirms that some arsenic can be leached out of CCA-treated wood playground structures into the surrounding surface, the public should not be overly alarmed about what this may mean in terms of exposure and potential health effects for their children” said John Blatherwick.

The standards referred to in the study for arsenic levels in soil are based on lifetime exposures to arsenic and contain significant safety margins, in recognition of the increased vulnerability of children. While the stringent standards for arsenic in soil (12 ppm) have been exceeded by two of the Vancouver playgrounds, the inherent safety margins have not been exceeded.

Blatherwick noted that the study acknowledges: “Research has yet to uncover evidence linking contact with sand from playgrounds containing CCA-treated wood to health effects associated with arsenic exposure.”

Prior to the release of this latest study, Environmental Health staff had already begun meeting with playground providers such as the Vancouver School Board, Vancouver Park Board and daycares to plan a comprehensive survey of CCA-treated playground equipment to better assess the risk to playground users within the health authority. A scientifically defensible sampling and analysis program will begin in March and the results will be analysed to determine whether exposures to arsenic exceed internationally-recognized levels and whether they pose an unacceptable risk. Where they do, a risk reduction and management plan will be implemented, which could include strategies ranging from applying sealants to replacing the CCA-treated portions of the structure with un-treated material. It should be noted that most playground providers in the City are gradually phasing out the use of CCA-treated equipment and no new CCA-treated equipment is being installed.

Results of the study will be released to the public by the Medical Health Officer.

“This is one of those stories that has the potential to unnecessarily alarm people and lead to them removing their children from playground activity. To put things in context, the long term risks from lack of physical activity are far greater than any theoretical risk from exposure to arsenic from playground structures.”

Contact: Domenic Losito
Director Environmental Health
Phone: 604-714-5677