



Considerations for Poor Air Quality Events

When air quality is likely to be poor, Northern Health and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy issue two kinds of notices to help people reduce their exposure to pollutants:

- 'Air Quality Advisories' are issued when air pollution levels are high, as detected by air quality monitors. These notices rarely last longer than 2-3 days.
- 'Smoky Skies Bulletins' are issued when high concentrations of smoke are observed or predicted. These are based on numerous tools and are not always confirmed by air quality monitors. Levels of smoke can change very quickly and these bulletins may remain in effect much longer due to the uncertainty and length of wildfire(s).

During poor air quality events, the recommendation is to consider staying indoors and to reduce strenuous outdoor exercise. In general, the harm from exposure

to poor air quality can outweigh the health benefits of outdoor physical activity. However, this depends on how poor the air quality is, how susceptible the individual is, and for how long they will actually be exposed to the air.

If you are responsible for children, or organizing an outdoor event (such as coaches, teachers, daycares, and sports clubs), you will need to use your discretion to decide whether outdoor activities should go ahead as planned, or whether they should be postponed or cancelled. To make an informed decision, you should consider:

- **Current air quality in your area:** Visit bcairquality.ca for up-to-date air quality information, including bulletins and advisories.

Air quality may be poor even though you cannot see or smell the pollution



- **Group characteristics:** Pregnant mothers, babies, children, and the elderly are all more susceptible to poor air quality events. Those with chronic lung disease (such as asthma) or heart disease are also more susceptible.

Children with asthma should have access to their medication and their caregivers should be made aware of their needs in the event of an emergency

- **The nature of the activity:** More vigorous activity will expose people to more air pollution. Consider, how strenuous it is; will it cause people to breathe heavier than usual; can the activity be modified?

- **Alternative locations:** Consider whether the event can be moved indoors, ideally into a space with a ventilation and filtration system or a portable air cleaner. Keep in mind that if the building is not well sealed, or has indoor sources of air pollution such as woodstoves or household chemicals, the indoor air quality may not be better than outdoors. Depending on the situation, events might also be moved to a different location that is away or upwind from the source of poor air quality (e.g. out of town or away from roadways, etc.).

If you decide to go ahead with the outdoor activity, advise individuals to listen to their bodies. If they are experiencing uncomfortable symptoms, such as coughing or irritated airways, they should rest and/or seek cleaner air space. Individuals with asthma should activate their asthma management plan. For health concerns or more serious symptoms, such as difficulty breathing or chest pain, call 8-1-1 (non-emergency) or 9-1-1 (emergency).

Maintaining good overall health is a great way to prevent health effects resulting from short-term exposure to air pollution. Once good air quality has resumed, please head outdoors and enjoy an active lifestyle.

Let's clear the air and breathe easier!

