



THE AIR QUALITY INDEX FACT SHEET

Using Air Quality Information to Protect Yourself From Ozone Air Pollution

The Air Quality Index, or AQI, is the standardized system that state and local air pollution control programs use to notify the public about levels of air pollution. Keeping track of the current air quality information can help you plan your activities during the ozone season so as to minimize your exposure to unhealthy levels of air pollution. This is especially important for people who are sensitive to air pollution, including young children, and people with asthma and other lung diseases. The American Lung Association also recommends that the elderly take precautions on high ozone and high particle pollution days.

How Does the Air Quality Index Work?

In most cities and suburbs, air pollution levels are measured daily and ranked on a scale of 0 for pristine air all the way up to 500 for air pollution levels that pose immediate danger to the public (fortunately, we do not have pollution levels that high in this country anymore). The AQI further breaks air pollution levels into five categories, each of which has a descriptor (name), color, and advisory statement. The AQI tracks levels of two pollutants: ozone (smog) and particle pollution. The purpose of the AQI is to help you understand what local air quality means to your health. To make it easier to understand, the AQI is divided into six categories. Each category corresponds to a different level of health concern. The six levels of health concern and what they mean are:

- **“Good”** The AQI value for your community is between 0 and 50. Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk.
- **“Moderate”** The AQI for your community is between 51 and 100. Air quality is acceptable; however, for some pollutants there may be a moderate health concern for a very small number of people. For example, people who are unusually sensitive to ozone may experience respiratory symptoms.
- **“Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups”** When AQI values are between 101 and 150, members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. This means they are likely to be affected at lower levels than the general public. For example, people with lung disease are at greater risk from exposure to ozone, while people with either lung disease or heart disease are at greater risk from exposure to particle pollution. The general public is not likely to be affected when the AQI is in this range.
- **“Unhealthy”** Everyone may begin to experience health effects when AQI values are between 151 and 200. Members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.
- **“Very Unhealthy”** AQI values between 201 and 300 trigger a health alert, meaning everyone may experience more serious health effects.
- **“Hazardous”** AQI values over 300 trigger health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected.

EPA has assigned a specific color to each AQI category to make it easier for people to understand quickly whether air pollution is reaching unhealthy levels in their communities. For example, the color orange means that conditions are “unhealthy for sensitive groups,” while red means that conditions may be “unhealthy for everyone,” and so on.

Air Quality Index Levels of Health Concern	Numerical Value	Meaning
Good	0-50	Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk.
Moderate	51-100	Air quality is acceptable; however, for some pollutants there may be a moderate health concern for a very small number of people who are unusually sensitive to air pollution.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	101-150	Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. The general public is not likely to be affected.
Unhealthy	151-200	Everyone may begin to experience health effects; members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.
Very Unhealthy	201-300	Health alert: everyone may experience more serious health effects.
Hazardous	> 300	Health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected.