



Allegheny County Health Department

Air Quality Program

Air Quality Index (AQI) Basics

The AQI is an index for reporting daily air quality. It tells you how clean or polluted your air is, and what associated health effects might be a concern for you. AQI focuses on health effects that you may experience a few hours or days after breathing polluted air.

Understanding the AQI

The purpose of the AQI is to help you understand what local air quality means to your health. Think of the AQI as a yardstick that runs from 0 to 500. The higher the AQI value, the greater the level of air pollution and the greater the health concern. To make it easier to understand, the AQI is divided into six categories:

Air Quality Index Levels of Health Concern	Numerical Value	Meaning
Good	0 to 50	Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk.
Moderate	51 to 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 to 150	Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. The general public is not likely to be affected.
Unhealthy	151 to 200	Everyone may begin to experience health effects; members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.
Very Unhealthy	201 to 300	Health alert: everyone may experience more serious health effects.
Hazardous	301 to 500	Health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected.

Things to do on a bad air quality day – orange or red:

- For your health – ozone is highest mid-afternoon, particulates are usually highest early morning.
- Schedule outdoor activities in the morning when ozone is lower, or late afternoon when particulates are lower.
- If the bad air day is also hot and humid, check in on elderly, those with breathing issues, and very young.
- Reduce prolonged or heavy outdoor exertion. Take more breaks, do less intense activities.
- Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. Schedule outdoor activities in the morning when ozone is lower.
- People with asthma, keep quick-relief medicine handy.

For the environment:

- Limit daytime driving. Combine trips when possible.
- Use public transit or ride share. Walk or bicycle for short trips.
- Avoid prolonged idling and jack rabbit starts.
- Don't refuel. If you must, do so after 7 p.m. Don't top off your tank.
- Postpone mowing the lawn until after 7 p.m.
- Use latex instead of oil-based paint.
- Save energy. Wash dishes and clothes with full loads.
- Keep window shades/blinds closed during the day to cut down on air conditioning.
- Don't burn wood outdoors.
- **Call 412-687-ACHD if you see industrial smoke.**