

Air Quality Guide for Particle Pollution

Harmful particle pollution is one of our nation's most common air pollutants. Use the chart below to help reduce your exposure and protect your health. Visit [AirNow.gov](#) for your local air quality forecast (www.airnow.gov).

Air Quality Index	Who Needs to be Concerned?	What Should I Do?
Good (0-50)		It's a great day to be active outside.
Moderate (51-100)	Some people who may be unusually sensitive to particle pollution.	Unusually sensitive people: Consider making outdoor activities shorter and less intense. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. These are signs to take it easier. Everyone else: It's a good day to be active outside.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (101-150)	Sensitive groups include people with heart or lung disease, older adults, children and teenagers, pregnant women, minority populations, and outdoor workers.	Sensitive groups: Make outdoor activities shorter and less intense. It's OK to be active outdoors, but take more breaks. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. People with asthma: Follow your asthma action plan and keep quick relief medicine handy. People with heart disease: Symptoms such as palpitations, shortness of breath, or unusual fatigue may indicate a serious problem. If you have any of these, contact your health care provider.
Unhealthy (151-200)	Everyone	Sensitive groups: Avoid long or intense outdoor activities. Consider rescheduling or moving activities indoors.* Everyone else: Reduce long or intense activities. Take more breaks during outdoor activities.
Very Unhealthy (201-300)	Everyone	Sensitive groups: Avoid all physical activity outdoors. Reschedule to a time when air quality is better or move activities indoors.* Everyone else: Avoid long or intense activities. Consider rescheduling or moving activities indoors.*
Hazardous (301-500)	Everyone	Everyone: Avoid all physical activity outdoors. Sensitive groups: Remain indoors and keep activity levels low. Follow tips for keeping particle levels low indoors.*

***Note:** If you don't have an air conditioner, staying inside with the windows closed may be dangerous in extremely hot weather. If you are hot, go someplace with air conditioning or check with your local government to find out if cooling centers are available in your community.

Key Facts to Know About Particle Pollution:

- Particle pollution can cause serious health problems, including asthma attacks, heart attacks, strokes and early death.
- Particle pollution can be a problem at any time of the year, depending on where you live.
- You can reduce your exposure to ozone pollution and still get exercise! Use [AirNow's](#) (www.airnow.gov) current Air Quality Index (AQI) information and forecasts to plan your outdoor activities.

What is particle pollution?

Particle pollution comes from many different sources. Fine particles (2.5 micrometers in diameter and smaller) come from power plants, industrial processes, vehicle tailpipes, woodstoves, and wildfires. Coarse particles (between 2.5 and 10 micrometers) come from crushing and grinding operations, road dust, and some agricultural operations.

Why is particle pollution a problem?

Particle pollution causes a number of serious health problems, including coughing, wheezing, reduced lung function, asthma attacks, heart attacks and strokes. It also is linked to early death in people with heart or lung disease.

Do I need to be concerned?

It's always smart to pay attention to your air quality, but it's especially true for people who may be at greater risk. They include:

- People with heart disease.
- People with lung disease, including asthma and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).
- Older adults.
- Children and teenagers because their lungs are still developing, and they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults.
- Pregnant women.
- Minority populations.
- Outdoor workers.

How can I protect myself?

Use [AQI forecasts, available on AirNow.gov](#) to plan outdoor activities. On days when the AQI is forecast to be unhealthy, check AirNow for your current air quality and take simple steps to reduce your exposure, including:

- Choose a less intense activity.
- Shorten your outdoor activities.
- Reschedule activities.
- Exercise away from busy roads.

When particle levels are high outdoors, they can be high indoors too.

Keep particles lower indoors:

- Reduce your [use of fireplaces and wood stoves](#). And don't use candles or smoke indoors.
- Use [HEPA air filters](https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq) (<https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq>) in your HVAC system.
- Buy or make your own portable air cleaner designed to reduce particles indoors.

Can I help reduce particle pollution?

Yes! Here are a few tips.

- Drive less: bike or walk, carpool, use public transportation.
- Use energy efficiently; choose ENERGY STAR certified products.
- For cleaner heat, upgrade to a heat pump, electric heat, or ductless heat pumps.
- Keep car, boat and other engines tuned.
- If you use wood for heat, burn it efficiently. Check [EPA's Burn Wise Program](#) for tips (www.epa.gov/burnwise).
- Don't burn leaves, garbage, plastic or rubber.