

Contact: Stephanie Shopbell
Environmental Health Manager
Email: sshopbell@granthealth.org
Phone: 509.766.7960 x41

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 9, 2022

School Alert: Worsening Air Quality Due to Wildfire Smoke

Grant County is experiencing worsening air quality in some areas and wind forecasts suggest that we'll continue to see some smoke coming our way through the weekend which will create worsening conditions. Decreased air quality may continue through the coming weeks due to several active wildfires in the Pacific Northwest.

Wildfire smoke is a mixture of gases and fine particles released when things burn. PM_{2.5} is particles less than 2.5 micrometers. This measurement is most valuable to protect health because these fine particles are small enough to be inhaled deep into the lungs and may even make it into your blood stream.

Poor air quality and inhaling wildfire smoke is unhealthy for all people but can significantly impact people with asthma and other lung diseases. Children are more sensitive to breathing PM_{2.5} because their lungs are still developing. Children with health conditions such as asthma, are at even great risk.

Air Quality is measured using the Air Quality Index (AQI). The AQI reports the level of air quality and health concerns across six color-coded categories. The AQI for PM_{2.5} is based on measurements over a 24-hour period and is not an instantaneous reading.

To reduce the risks, Grant County Health District recommends the following:

- Check local air quality reports throughout the day. Links to recommended websites are in the Resources section.
- Follow all WA Department of Health guidance on limiting or cancelling outdoor activities including recess, athletic practices, and competitions. The table can be seen on the following page and is linked in the Resources section.
- Consider using HEPA filters (MERV-13 rating or higher) in your HVAC units or use high efficiency indoor air cleaner in one or more rooms.
- Routinely check on students or staff who have breathing problems when outdoor air quality is unhealthy.

Table 1. Washington Air Quality Guide for School and Child Care Activities (WA DOH)

Outside Air Quality Index: PM2.5					
Check current and forecast air quality at enviwa.ecology.wa.gov					
	Good (0-50)	Moderate (51-100)	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (101-150)	Unhealthy (151-200)	Very Unhealthy/ Hazardous (>200)
Recess (15 minutes)	No restrictions.	Allow children with health conditions (see below*) to stay indoors.	Keep children with health conditions indoors. Keep activity levels light for these children unless indoor PM2.5 levels are below 35.5 µg/m ³ (see following page).	Keep all children indoors. Keep activity levels light unless indoor PM2.5 levels are below 35.5 µg/m ³ .	Keep all children indoors. Keep activity levels light unless indoor air is filtered, and indoor PM2.5 levels are below 35.5 µg/m ³ .
P.E. (1 hour)	No restrictions.	Allow children with health conditions to stay indoors and monitor symptoms for those who participate. Increase rest periods for these children as needed.	Keep children with health conditions indoors. Keep activities light for these children unless indoor PM2.5 levels are below 35.5 µg/m ³ . For others, limit to light outdoor activities. Allow any children to stay indoors if they do not want to go	Keep all children indoors. Keep activity levels light unless indoor PM2.5 levels are below 35.5 µg/m ³ .	Keep all children indoors. Keep activity levels light unless indoor air is filtered, and indoor PM2.5 levels are below 35.5 µg/m ³ .
Athletic Events and Practices (Vigorous activity 2-3 hours)	No restrictions.	Allow children with health conditions to opt out and monitor symptoms for those who join. Increase rest periods for these children.	Cancel children’s outdoor athletic events and practices or move them to an area with safer air quality, either indoors or to a different location.	Cancel children’s outdoor athletic events and practices or move them to an area with safer air quality, either indoors or to a different location. Consider time spent in poor air quality during transit before relocating.	Cancel children’s outdoor athletic events and practices or move them to an area with safer air quality, either indoors with filtered air or to a different location. Consider time spent in poor air quality during transit before relocating.

**Health conditions include asthma and other lung disease, respiratory infection, heart disease, and diabetes. See the following page for more details about children’s health, improving indoor air quality, and steps to reduce exposure.*

For school districts without a local air quality monitoring station the following table may be helpful in estimating the AQI.

Table 2. AQI Estimate Using Visibility

Visibility in Miles	Air Quality Index	Air Quality Category
10 or more	0-50	Good
5-10	51-100	Moderate
3-5	101-150	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups
1.5-3	151-200	Unhealthy
1	201-300	Very Unhealthy
Less than 1	More than 300	Hazardous

Resources

Please review the following resources for recommendations on how to protect students, families, and staff. The following links provide helpful information to further assist your decision making.

Event and Activity Recommendations

- Washington Air Quality Guide for School and Child Care Activities (WA DOH):
 - English: <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/Pubs/334-332.pdf?uid=631ba378e200d>
 - Spanish: <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/Pubs/334-332-SP.pdf?uid=631b6c4d8f21f>
- Summary Wildfire Smoke Guidance for Closing Schools (WA DOH): <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/4300/334-431-WildfireSmokeSCHOOLSummary.pdf?uid=631ba378e581a>
- Summary Wildfire Smoke Guidance for Canceling Outdoor Events or Activities (WA DOH): <https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/4300/334-430-WildfireSmokeOUTDOORSummary.pdf?uid=631ba378e515f>
- Local Health Officer Guidance for Canceling Outdoor Events or Activities and Closing Schools (WA DOH): https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/4300/334-428-WildfireSmokeClosureGuidance_final3.pdf?uid=631ba378e303c
- Washington Air Quality Guide for Particle Pollution (Additional languages available from the DOH Toolkit)
 - English: <https://enviwa.ecology.wa.gov/Documents/WhatIsAQI.pdf>
 - Spanish: https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/4300/waqa%20infographic_Spanish.pdf?uid=631ba378db420
- Washington Department of Health Smoke from Wildfires Toolkit: <https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/air-quality/smoke-fires/smoke-wildfires-toolkit>

Air Quality Monitoring Resources

- Washington's Air Monitoring Network (choose PM_{2.5} from the top of the map): <https://enviwa.ecology.wa.gov/home/map>
- WA Air Monitoring Network Smoke Forecast: <https://enviwa.ecology.wa.gov/home/text/421#Forecast>
- Washington Smoke Information: <http://wasmoke.blogspot.com>

###