

The Air Quality Health Index:

How Air Pollution Affects Your Health

ARE YOU AT RISK?

Every individual reacts differently to air pollution. Children, the elderly and those with heart or lung disease are most sensitive to the health effects of air pollution. People with diabetes are also at greater risk because they are more prone to heart disease. Even Canadians who are relatively fit and healthy can experience symptoms when exercising or working outdoors if pollution levels are higher than usual.

Air pollution has a measurable impact on human health. An analysis of data from Canadian cities shows that 5,900 deaths can be linked to air pollution every year. Air pollution sends thousands more Canadians to hospital each year. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1.3 million deaths worldwide can be attributed to urban outdoor air pollution.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH

We can protect our health from the negative health effects of air pollution by appropriately changing our behaviour to reduce our exposure to air pollutants when air quality deteriorates. Checking the *Air Quality Health Index* on a regular basis is the first step.

THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF AIR POLLUTION

Depending on the length of time you are exposed, your health status, your genetic background, and the concentration of pollutants, air pollution can:

- Make it harder to breathe
- Irritate your eyes, nose and throat
- Worsen chronic diseases such as heart disease, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and asthma
- Lead to premature death

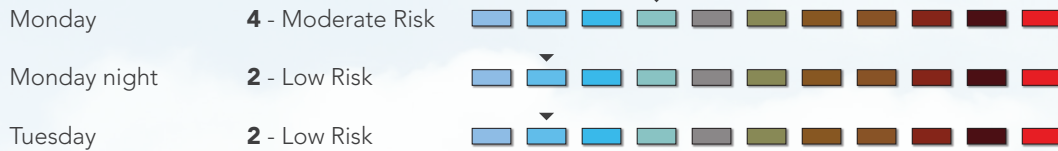
Negative health effects increase as air pollution worsens. Studies show that even modest increases in air pollution can cause small but measurable increases in emergency room visits, hospital admissions and death.

Winnipeg - Air Quality Health Index

Current



Forecast Maximums



The index assesses the impact of air pollution on your health, listing a color coded number from 1 to 10+ to indicate the level of immediate health risk associated with local air quality.

The higher the number, the greater the risk—and the greater your need to take precautions.

The index describes the level of health risk associated with these numbers as ‘low’, ‘moderate’, ‘high’ or ‘very high’, accompanied by health advice for the general population and for those at increased risk.

In addition to current air quality health information, a forecast is provided for the next day.

USING THE INDEX TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH

The index is available in many communities across Canada. Look for it with weather forecasts (weather.gc.ca) for your community or go to airhealth.ca. The index is also available at theweathernetwork.ca. Use the forecasts to plan your activities, whether over the next hour or the next day.

Seniors, children and people with asthma, diabetes, heart or lung disease, can use the index to assess the immediate risk air pollution poses to your health and take steps to lessen that risk.

Even if you’re relatively healthy, fit and active, you should consult the index to decide when and how much to exercise or work outdoors.

The index can’t perfectly measure the health effects of the air you breathe. Pollen, dust, heat/humidity and odours can affect your health. Always pay attention to what your body is telling and follow your doctor’s advice.

Health Risk	Air Quality Health Index	HEALTH MESSAGES	
		At Risk Population*	General Population
Low Risk	1–3	Enjoy your usual outdoor activities.	Ideal air quality for outdoor activities.
Moderate Risk	4–6	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you are experiencing symptoms.	No need to modify your usual outdoor activities unless you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.
High Risk	7–10	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.
Very High Risk	Above 10	Avoid strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also avoid outdoor physical exertion.	Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors, especially if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.

For more information, visit airhealth.ca