

OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY GUIDELINES

Introduction

Poor outdoor air quality can impact individuals' health, especially those who are physically active outside. The negative effects are worse for individuals who are more sensitive to air pollution, including individuals with pre-existing medical issues such as asthma and other heart/lung diseases. Young children, seniors, and those participating in high-exertion activities are at higher risk of being affected by poor air quality.

Canada's Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) was developed to support individuals to make decisions to protect their health, with the primary purpose of providing information on the state of air quality at a specific location. Associated health messages suggest the types of actions that individuals should consider when determining what precautions to take during a poor air quality event.

Background

Poor air quality often arises from urban and industrial air pollution and possibly exacerbated by wildfire smoke and weather events such as inversions that trap pollutants low to the ground (Health Canada, 2021). Poor air quality events may last for a few hours or days, or much longer periods.

What is AQHI?

The Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) is a risk mitigation tool that describes local air quality as it relates to human health.

At Scouts Canada

Scouts Canada is committed to ensuring a safe environment for youth above all else. In the event of an air quality advisory, Scouts Canada uses the Government of Canada's [Observed Air Quality Index](#) and [Air Quality Guidelines](#) as its two primary resources for making informed decisions around any changes, rescheduling or reduction of its camping/Scouting programs and activities. As conditions change, the Scouter in Charge or Group Commissioner will always make decisions in the best interest of the members and whenever possible, commit to running the camp and activities as scheduled (outdoors).

How do I use the AQHI

You can access the AQHI through the [Government of Canada's Online portal](#), by using the [WeatherCAN app](#), or the [AQHI Canada app](#) produced by the Government of Alberta (the app encompasses readings from all of Canada not just Alberta).

Using the AQHI tools gives access to 300 monitoring stations across the country including, current and future readings (24h).

Simply use one of the above tools, enter your activity location and you will be given up to date air quality readings. Use the air aware resource or chart below to determine any further courses of action.

The best time to use the app to assess the current reading is before you go!

The Scouter in Charge should include checking the AQHI readings as part of their weather check process for outdoor activities. Using the chart below and Air Aware resource assess if any adjustments should be made.

If any adjustments need to be made notify other Scouters and parents ahead of time.

As the old saying goes if you don't like the weather wait five minutes.

We know that weather conditions can change rapidly; wildfires, smog advisories, and varying weather events can all alter air quality. If an onsite reading is conducted and the AQHI levels are "high" (+7) the Scouter in Charge may need to alter or stop an activity, similar to experiencing any adverse weather conditions. Ensuring a completed and up to date AAF & ERP for your activity will help determine how to react to a change.

**Air Quality Rating:
1–3 (low)**

Enjoy your activity!

**Air Quality Rating:
4–6 (Moderate to Low)**

- Programs will run normally.
- Members with pre-existing health conditions or those with health concerns will be given additional rest or water breaks as required.

**Air Quality Rating:
7–10+ (High)**

- Sessions may be rescheduled to a future date, or when possible, moved indoors.
- Programs may continue as scheduled but the program may move to more low impact activities with high exertion or strenuous activities reduced to a safe level.
- Members will be given longer rest and water breaks throughout the activity, and those with pre-existing health conditions (as indicated on their registration form) will be monitored closely.
- Members may choose not to participate in camp activities or withdraw voluntarily.

Health messages for the AQHI

Health Risk: LOW AQHI: 1–3	Health Risk: MODERATE AQHI: 4–6	Health Risk: HIGH AQHI: 7–10	Health Risk: VERY HIGH AQHI: Above 10
<p>At Risk Population*</p> <p>Enjoy your usual outdoor activities.</p>	<p>At Risk Population</p> <p>Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you are experiencing symptoms.</p>	<p>At Risk Population</p> <p>Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.</p>	<p>At Risk Population</p> <p>Avoid strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also avoid outdoor physical exertion.</p>
<p>General Population</p> <p>Ideal air quality for outdoor activities.</p>	<p>General Population</p> <p>No need to modify your usual outdoor activities unless you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.</p>	<p>General Population</p> <p>Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.</p>	<p>General Population</p> <p>Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors, especially if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.</p>

* People with heart or breathing problems are at greater risk. Follow your doctor’s usual advice about exercising and managing your condition (Government of Canada, 2015).