

# Guidance for Georgia Families

## *Outdoor Air Quality & Physical Activity*



### Can Air Pollution Make You Sick?

Yes! Breathing air that is polluted can lead to serious health problems, including asthma attacks and heart trouble. The effects of air pollution are greatest when outdoor air pollution is at its worst, but some people have trouble even when air pollution is not bad enough to cause a problem for others.



We worry particularly about children breathing polluted air because their lungs are still developing, they breathe more air in relation to body weight than adults, and they are active outdoors a great deal. Elderly people and those with heart or lung diseases are also more likely to have trouble on “bad air” days. If you have a child or other family member with asthma, it is very important that you know when the outdoor air is unhealthy.

### How Do You Know When the Air Is Unhealthy?

A measure called the Air Quality Index (AQI) rates daily air quality on a scale from 0 (the cleanest) to 500 (the most polluted). Health warnings are set according to research studies that link health risks with different amounts of air pollution.

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) issues a smog alert whenever the AQI is predicted to be more than 100. Atlanta area residents may sign up to receive emailed alerts through the following web site:  
[www.CleanAirCampaign.org](http://www.CleanAirCampaign.org).

Macon area residents may contact the Middle Georgia Clean Air Coalition to sign up for smog alerts: [Charise.Stephens@macon.ga.us](mailto:Charise.Stephens@macon.ga.us).

Another way to check for an alert is to call the EPD Air Quality hotline: 404.362.4909.

Year-round daily forecasts are available through the EPD web site:  
[www.georgiaair.org/smogforecast](http://www.georgiaair.org/smogforecast). These forecasts predict air quality for the following day to help you plan outdoor activities.

### When and Where Is Air Pollution a Problem in Georgia?

The two kinds of outdoor air pollution to worry about in Georgia are ground-level ozone and fine particles. These pollutants together are sometimes called smog. The twenty-county metro Atlanta area and the Macon area fail air quality standards set by the federal government. Mid-sized cities such as Athens, Augusta and Columbus also have days when air pollution reaches unhealthy levels. Rural parts of Georgia sometimes have problems with high particle pollution, usually from open burning, diesel engines and wildfires.

Although air pollution can be a problem at any time of year, most smog forms during the warm months of late spring and summer, from early May through late September. It is very important to pay attention to air quality during this time, known as “smog season.”

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## Recommended Changes in Outdoor Activities

AQI	Health Concern	Recommendation
GREEN 0-50	The air is considered healthy for everyone.	Outdoor activities are recommended for all children and adults.
YELLOW 51-100	The air is unhealthy mainly for very sensitive children and adults.	Outdoor activities are recommended for most children and adults except those known to respond to air pollution at this level.*
ORANGE 101-150	The air is unhealthy for sensitive individuals, <u>including all children</u> under the age of 18, <u>the elderly</u> , and those with <u>heart or lung conditions</u> .	Outdoor exertion for all children, the elderly and for sensitive adults should be <u>limited</u> . When possible, all outdoor activity should be moved to times of day when the pollutant of concern is lowest. Avoid breathing hard outdoors for more than a short period of time.
RED 151-200	The air is unhealthy for everyone.	Outdoor activities should be <u>avoided completely</u> for children and adults. Depending on the pollutant that is high, there may be some times during the day that are safer for outdoor activity (see yellow box, below). Avoid breathing hard outdoors at all.
PURPLE 201-400	The air is unhealthy or even hazardous for everyone.	Outdoor activities should be avoided completely for all children and adults, throughout the day and evening.

*\*Parents and other caregivers should watch children and the elderly carefully for signs of distress to find out if they are particularly sensitive to air pollution. Be sure always to carry medications for people in your care who have asthma.*

### **Ozone and particle pollution go up and down with different patterns.**

- Ozone pollution is usually at its worst between 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Move outdoor activities to the morning, and limit outdoor time after 2:00 p.m. as much as possible.
- Particle pollution may peak during morning and evening rush hour but sometimes stays high all day. Limit outdoor time throughout the day and evening.
- If both ozone and particle pollution are high, limit outdoor activity all day and in the evening.
- If a conditioned, indoor space is not available, reduce the duration and intensity of outdoor activities. The harder the breathing, the more air pollution is taken into the body.

To check the AQI for a number of locations in Georgia go to: [www.georgiaair.org/tmp/today/amp\\_AQI.html](http://www.georgiaair.org/tmp/today/amp_AQI.html).