



# News Release

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## **Poor air quality can stifle summer fun**

*Checking local air quality can help you stay healthy and enjoy summertime activities*

**OLYMPIA** — Outdoor fun can leave you breathless if the summer air is thick from smog or wildfire smoke. That’s why the Department of Health wants people to take steps to lower the health risks from poor air quality.

Air quality can worsen during summer months when exhaust from cars and industrial sources combine with hot sunny days to create ozone gas known as “smog.” Summer heat and lightning strikes also add to the risk of smoke from wildfires, which can make it difficult for asthma sufferers and those with heart and lung ailments to breathe. Poor air quality even puts healthy people at risk for respiratory problems.

“We want people to be aware of the risks and know how to protect themselves from health problems related to poor air quality,” explains Environmental Public Health Assistant Secretary, Maryanne Guichard.

After several days of high heat and sun, ozone often increases near the ground where people can breathe it. Ozone irritates and can eventually scar the lungs. Breathing smoke from wildfires can make anyone cough or wheeze, and people who have asthma or other lung diseases may have more severe symptoms. As pollutant particles build up in the respiratory system, they can cause a variety of health problems, including burning eyes, runny noses, and illnesses such as bronchitis.

The particles can also aggravate heart conditions, and lung diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, and asthma. Children and adults age 65 and older are at higher risk for health effects from air pollution.

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People, especially those with lung or heart disease, should limit outdoor activities and exercise when air quality is poor. When people are exerting themselves, they breathe more air, and if air quality is bad, more air pollution gets into their lungs.

Checking [current air quality](#) for your area on the [Department of Ecology's website](#) is the first step in preparing for smoke-related incidents. The Department of Health websites [Outdoor Air Quality](#) and [Smoke from Fires](#) have more information and prevention tips. The [Washington Tracking Network](#) has detailed information on air pollution for most counties.

State health officials have developed [frequently asked questions](#) on wildfire smoke and a way for local public health leaders to decide the [types of activities that should be limited or canceled](#) based on air quality and physical exertion.

While the number and severity of wildfires varies year by year, the trend is that the size and intensity are increasing. [Climate change projections](#) suggest rising temperatures, longer lasting heat waves, and dryer summers may continue that trend.

During times when the air is heavy with pollutants, there are things people can do to help improve air quality. Examples include obeying burn bans; limiting driving by carpooling, riding the bus, biking, or walking to work; avoiding letting cars idle, and using electric yard equipment instead of gas-powered mowers, edgers, and weed eaters.

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