

“A yellow air quality alert has been issued...”

“DEQ is reporting that the AQI is 120...”

“Air quality is considered unhealthy for sensitive populations...”

Headlines such as these appear in Idaho’s news media from time to time to alert people to air quality conditions based on the Air Quality Index (AQI). This brochure explains the AQI and what it means to you, your family, your health, and air quality in Idaho.

Each day, concentrations of air pollutants are measured in areas across Idaho. A federal standard, or limit, has been established for each air pollutant. These limits are based on the health effects of the pollution and vary by type of pollutant.

After the amount of pollution is measured, it is compared to the federal standard. To help us compare the various pollutants and determine the air quality, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed the AQI.



For More Information

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Web Resources

AIRNow
www.airnow.gov

Air Quality Index
www.deq.idaho.gov/air-quality-monitoring

Daily Air Quality Reports and Forecasts
www.deq.idaho.gov/daily-air-quality-reports-forecasts



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Air Quality in Idaho:

You Are What You Breathe



The Air Quality Index and You



Idaho Department of
Environmental Quality
www.deq.idaho.gov



What is the Air Quality Index?

The AQI is a guide for reporting daily air quality. Its purpose is to help individuals understand what local air quality conditions can mean to their health. The AQI indicates how clean or polluted the air is in a particular area and identifies potential health impacts. The AQI focuses on health effects that can happen within a few hours or days after breathing polluted air.

DEQ uses the AQI for five major air pollutants regulated by the Clean Air Act: ground-level ozone, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. For each of these pollutants, EPA has established a National Ambient Air Quality Standard to protect against harmful health effects.

How Does the AQI Work?

The AQI works as a measuring stick that runs from 0 to 500. The higher the AQI value, the greater the air pollution and health risk. For example, an AQI value of 25 represents good air quality and little potential to affect public health, while an AQI value over 300 represents hazardous air quality with potentially serious health impacts.

An AQI value of 100 generally corresponds to the national air quality standard for the pollutant, which is the level EPA has set to protect public health. So, AQI values below 100 are considered healthful. When AQI values are above 100, air quality is considered to be unhealthy—at first for certain sensitive groups of people, then for everyone as AQI values get higher.

How is the AQI Calculated?

Air quality in Idaho is measured by monitors that record the concentrations of several air pollutants throughout the state each day. The raw measurements are then converted into AQI values using standard formulas developed by EPA.

What Do the Color-Coded Alerts Mean? How Do They Correspond to the AQI?

The AQI scale is divided into six categories, each of which indicates a level of “healthy-ness” of the air and is represented by a particular color. These are the colors you may see listed as indicators of air quality in the news media or on DEQ’s website.

Category	Index Value	Level of Health Concern	How Does This Affect Me?
Green	0-50	Good. Air quality is considered satisfactory and air pollution poses little or no risk.	The air quality is good. No precautions necessary. Breathe deeply and enjoy!
Yellow	51-100	Moderate. Air quality is acceptable; however, for some pollutants there may be a moderate health concern for a very small number of individuals. For example, people who are unusually sensitive to ozone may experience respiratory symptoms if ozone levels fall into this range.	Sensitive people* should plan strenuous outside activities when air quality is better.
Orange	101-150	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups. Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects.	Sensitive people* should cut back or reschedule strenuous outside activities. Everyone else should consider limiting strenuous outdoor activities.
Red	151-200	Unhealthy. Everyone may begin to experience health effects. Members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.	Sensitive people* should avoid strenuous outside activities. Everyone else should cut back or reschedule strenuous outside activities.
Purple	201-300	Very Unhealthy. This will trigger a health alert, meaning everyone may experience serious health effects.	Sensitive people* should avoid all outside physical activities. Everyone else should significantly cut back on outside physical activities.
Maroon	301-500	Hazardous. This triggers health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is likely to be affected.	Everyone should avoid all outside physical activities.

** Sensitive people/groups include children, the elderly, those with existing health conditions, and people who have high exposure (those who work, exercise, or spend extensive time outdoors).*

How Can I Find Information on the AQI Where I Live?

DEQ reports the AQI for various communities around Idaho where air quality is measured.

- You can find the AQI for your (or a nearby) community at www.deq.idaho.gov/daily-air-quality-reports-forecasts
- Subscribe to EPA’s EnviroFlash at www.enviroflash.info/signup.cfm to receive air quality alerts.
- Subscribe to DEQ’s e-mail subscription service for e-mail bulletins at www.deq.idaho.gov/daily-air-quality-reports-forecasts. (look for the note that says “Subscribe to this page”).
- Check your local newspaper, TV and radio stations, and state and local telephone hotlines.