

## **Air quality and strenuous outdoor activity**

Wildfires across the province have resulted in smoky skies and poor air quality for many Interior Health communities. During times of poor air quality, it's important that individuals take steps to protect their health and wellbeing. Over the last week we have received questions from community members and local organizations about the health risks of strenuous outdoor activities.

In BC we use the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) to make recommendations for modifying outdoor activity and/or avoiding smoke. This index takes into consideration levels of particulate matter, NO<sub>2</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, and other gases that are known to negatively impact lung capacity, heart function, and blood flow to muscles and brain tissue. Smoke affects everyone differently, but those most at risk include individuals with underlying medical conditions such as asthma, COPD, heart disease, or diabetes, and infants, the elderly and pregnant women.

The best way to protect your health when skies are smoky is to reduce your exposure and seek cleaner air. When the AQHI is moderate or higher (equal to and/or above 4), Interior Health recommends that individuals consider reducing or avoiding strenuous activities, and follow the [recommendations provided on the BC Air Quality website](#) (shown below).

If you are experiencing clinical symptoms of any kind, contact your health care provider or local walk-in clinic. If your symptoms are severe, seek emergency medical attention.

For more information on precautions when air quality is poor visit [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca) or contact HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.

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The following table provides the health messages for 'at risk' individuals and the general public for each of the AQHI Health Risk Categories.

Health Risk	AQHI Index	Health Messages	
		At Risk Population <sup>1</sup>	General Population
<b>Low</b>	1 - 3	<b>Enjoy</b> your usual outdoor activities.	<b>Ideal</b> air quality for outdoor activities.
<b>Moderate (MOD)</b>	4 - 6	<b>Consider reducing</b> or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you are experiencing symptoms.	<b>No need to modify</b> your usual outdoor activities unless you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.
<b>High</b>	7 - 10	<b>Reduce</b> or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.	<b>Consider reducing</b> or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.
<b>Very High</b>	Above 10	<b>Avoid</b> strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also avoid outdoor physical exertion.	<b>Reduce</b> or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors, especially if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.

<sup>1</sup> People with heart or breathing problems are at greater risk. Follow your doctor's usual advice about exercising and managing your condition.

Source: Environment Canada