

OUTDOOR AIR QUALITY

Background

Poor air quality can significantly impact on the health and performance of individuals participating in outdoor activities, including students and staff. The Northwest School Division acknowledges the potential short- and long-term effects of engaging in outdoor physical activities when air quality is compromised. The Northwest School Division is dedicated to mitigating the risks associated with poor air quality for outdoor activity participants. This document serves as a guideline for schools concerning outdoor activities in relation to air quality. Similar to how outdoor activities may be canceled or rescheduled due to adverse weather conditions such as lightning, it is equally crucial to take protective measures when air quality is poor.

Definitions

Outdoor Activities: This includes outdoor physical education classes, extracurricular activities, field trips, outdoor education, recess, and non-hour activities.

Air Quality: Air quality refers to the condition of outdoor air in relation to weather, climate, and smoke from sources such as forest or grass fires. Air quality impacted by industrial activities or emergent situations should be addressed by relevant authorities.

Air Quality Scale: Air Quality is measured by Environment Canada using the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI), which operates on a scale from 1 to 11.

Procedures

1. The Northwest School Division will actively monitor outdoor air quality, particularly during the fall and spring seasons when smoke from forest and grass fires is most prevalent
2. Upon issuance of air quality warnings by Environment Canada, principals, staff supervisors, and/or coaches will refer to the Real-Time Air Quality Map by Purple Air to assess the air quality in the area where the outdoor activity is scheduled to take place. [Canadian PM2.5 by PurpleAir](#)
3. Decisions regarding outdoor activities will be based on the nature and duration of the activity, as well as the age and health of the participants.
4. Outdoor Education Trips: Considering the rapid changes in air quality, schools planning overnight or extended outdoor field trips must incorporate contingency plans for AQHI in their trip itineraries. Prior to departure, check the air quality conditions, have a plan for moving activities indoors, and prepare for an early return if necessary.

5. Rescheduling extracurricular activities can present significant logistical challenges, especially when external venues and specialized personnel, such as officials, are involved. Additionally, many competitive high school sports are time-sensitive regarding advancing to championships. Schools are encouraged to collaborate with school-based administrators, the athletic director, and the superintendent to determine the most appropriate course of action when air quality affects extracurricular events.
6. Outdoor activities such as physical education classes, outdoor field trips, and/or extracurricular activities that are longer in duration and intensity will adhere to the following guidelines:

Health Risk	Air Quality Health Index	Health Messages		School Messages for Outdoor Activities
		General Population	At Risk Population	
Low Risk	1-3	Ideal air quality for outdoor activities	Enjoy your usual outdoor activities	All planned activities can proceed
Moderate Risk	4-6	No need to modify your usual outdoor activities unless you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous outdoor activities if you are experiencing symptoms.	All planned outdoor activities can proceed.
High Risk	7-10	Consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous outdoor activities if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.	Reduce or reschedule strenuous outdoor activities. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.	- Recess and lunch breaks can proceed but allow the option of coming indoors. - Consider moving strenuous Physical Education/Wellness classes indoors. - Consider postponing or adapting extra-curricular events with clean air breaks.
Very High Risk	11	Reduce or reschedule strenuous outdoor activities, especially if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.	Avoid strenuous outdoor activities. Children and the elderly should also avoid outdoor physical exertion.	- Allow for indoor recess and lunch breaks. - Outdoor Physical Education / Wellness classes should move indoors. - Extra-curricular events should be postponed or moved indoors, if possible.

Adapted from Environment Canada's [Understanding Air Quality Health Index messages - Canada.ca](#). Individuals in the "At Risk Population" should consult the local Health Authority or health professionals for accurate advice about exercising and managing specific conditions.

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