

Long GTA article (Total number of words: 289)

## **Use the Air Quality Health Index to Protect Yourself from Local Air Pollution**

Poor air quality is associated with thousands of premature deaths and hospitalizations in Canada each year. Air pollution worsens heart problems and aggravates lung conditions, such as asthma and bronchitis. In healthy people, air pollution reduces lung function and irritates the eyes nose and throat.

The **Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)** is a national tool available to help individuals protect themselves and the people they care for. The Air Quality Health Index reports air quality in relation to health on a scale from 1 to 10. The higher the reading, the greater the health risk and need to take precaution.

The AQHI helps people plan ahead by telling them the best time of the day to be physically active and when to reduce or reschedule strenuous outdoor activity. The AQHI provides health messages for both the at-risk and the general population. The at-risk group includes children, the elderly, and people with pre-existing heart and breathing problems.

When the Air Quality Health Index reaches seven or above, people with heart or breathing problems should reduce or reschedule strenuous outdoor activities. Children and the elderly should also take it easy. AQHI forecasts are posted at [www.airhealth.ca](http://www.airhealth.ca) and readings are updated hourly.

The AQHI helps to protect our health, and also serves as a reminder of the need to protect our environment. Because cars, trucks and coal-fired power plants are major sources of air pollution, reducing energy use can reduce the number of high AQHI days.

The "20/20 The Way to Clean Air" Campaign is designed to help individuals reduce both home energy use and vehicle use by 20 per cent. To order a free 20/20 Planner with a step-by-step action plan to reduce your energy use call 1-866-583-2020 or visit [www.cleanairpartnership.org/2020](http://www.cleanairpartnership.org/2020).

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