

Long Toronto article (Total number of words: 311)

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

In Toronto, it is estimated that every year 1,700 early deaths and 6,000 hospitalizations are associated with poor air quality. 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.

“When the Air Quality Health Index reaches seven or above, people with heart or breathing problems should reduce or reschedule strenuous outdoor activities,” said Dr. David McKeown, Toronto’s Medical Officer of Health. “Children, the elderly or anyone experiencing symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation should also take it easy.”

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.

The AQHI helps to protect our health, and also serves as a reminder of the need to protect our environment,” said Dr. McKeown. “Because cars and trucks, and our reliance on coal-fired power plants to generate electricity are major sources of air pollution in Toronto, reducing energy use can reduce the number of high AQHI days.”

Toronto Public Health’s “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.

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