

# Sonoma County Schools Air Quality Guidance

## About the Guidelines:

- Guidelines were modified from Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Centers for Disease Control's [Air Quality and Outdoor Activity Guidance for Schools](#) and [Wildfire Smoke: A Guide for Public Health Officials](#).
- They were developed by Sonoma County school districts in consultation with the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the Northern Sonoma County Air Pollution Control District (NSCAPCD), and the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE).
- They are meant to assist school districts in making decisions when air quality is poor. *School closure is ultimately a district-by-district decision based on local conditions.*
- **Guidelines are provided on an interim basis until statewide guidelines can be established.** ● The impact of smoke depends on the sensitivity of the person and the length of exposure. Children are considered more sensitive because their developing lungs and heightened activity make them more sensitive to the impacts of smoke.

## Choosing to Use the Guidelines:

- School districts will monitor the air quality index (AQI) using EPA's AQI monitoring tools at [AirNow.gov](#).
- School activities/closures decisions will be made based on AirNow measurements and local conditions, such as the availability/quality of air filtration and direct observation of indoor/outdoor air quality.
- School districts will report any school closures to SCOE for media notification.
- School districts will announce any closures to families using normal school closure procedures.
- Children with respiratory or heart conditions are vulnerable to poor air quality and may require extra precautions. School districts should advise parents to consult with their family health care provider.

## About AirNow.gov:

- Airnow.gov is a network of monitors maintained and operated by trained government agencies. ● It is recommended by air management districts, the California Air Resources Board, and the EPA. ● AirNow monitors combine to form a network to track regional air quality. According to experts with local air quality management districts, pollutants like smoke tend to be well-mixed in the atmosphere and are adequately represented by these monitors, even if a monitor is not in the same neighborhood as a school.
- Highly accurate tools are regularly monitored for quality control by EPA. Tools remain accurate at all levels as opposed to personal sensors like Purple Air, which overestimate (especially at AQI of 150 or higher).

## About Masks:

- There is insufficient data to support the benefit of prolonged use of N95 respirators in wildfire smoke events.
- When air is unhealthy, the best option is to reduce physical activity and stay indoors with windows/doors closed. If indoor temperature is high, get to a location with cleaner, filtered air such as a public library, shopping mall or other building with HVAC system filtration.
- Masks have limitations. Surgical gauze masks provide no protection from smoke. N95 respirator masks are designed for professional use by trained adults and are not intended for children. Therefore, masks are not recommended for children by most air quality districts/public health agencies.
- N95 masks require a perfect seal to be effective. They can give a false sense of security without a proper fit.
- N95 masks may be dangerous for certain persons with lung or heart conditions and may lead to increased heart rate, respiratory rate, and/or labored breathing.
- Masks must be kept clean and replaced frequently to be effective.

## Recommendations for Ensuring Cleaner Air at School:

- Install and maintain HVAC air conditioning system with high-quality air filters that have medium or high efficiency. [EPA recommendations for air filtration are given here.](#)
- Install portable HEPA air filters in classrooms where possible. [See approved filters here.](#)
- Be sure that portable filters are sized correctly for the room.
- Ensure doors and windows are sealed tightly. Minimize air movement in and out of room.

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Air Quality Index	Recommended School Activities	School Actions	District Actions
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(measured at <a href="http://airnow.gov">airnow.gov</a> )			
 <p>(0-50) GOOD</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great day to be active outside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>
 <p>(51-100) MODERATE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good day to be active outside</li> <li>• Students who are unusually sensitive to air pollution could have symptoms.*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor readings, keep staff aware of sensitive students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor the situation if index worsens</li> </ul>
 <p>(101-150) UNHEALTHY FOR SENSITIVE GROUPS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's OK to be active outside for <b>short activities</b> (&lt;30 min.) such as recess and PE</li> <li>• For <b>longer activities</b> such as athletic practice, take more breaks and do less intense activities. Consider moving indoors or rescheduling.</li> <li>• Watch for symptoms and take action as needed*<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Students with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and keep their quick-relief medicine handy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform staff that restrictions are in place based on these recommendations</li> <li>• Ensure that staff are following the guidelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind site administrators of restrictions at this level</li> <li>• Monitor the situation if index worsens</li> </ul>
 <p>(151-200) UNHEALTHY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider moving <b>outdoor activities</b> indoors or rescheduling them</li> <li>• Any outdoor activities should be less intense and include a lot of breaks</li> <li>• Watch for symptoms and take action as needed.* Students with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and keep their quick-relief medicine handy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform staff that restrictions are in place based on these recommendations</li> <li>• Move all athletic related events to indoors if possible or reduce to less intense activities if moving to indoors is not possible</li> <li>• Ensure that staff are following the guidelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind site administrators of restrictions at this level</li> <li>• Monitor the situation if index worsens</li> <li>• Determine if there are site by site concerns.</li> <li>• Respond to school if there are site by site concerns to support and determine severity</li> </ul>
 <p>(201 and higher) VERY UNHEALTHY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move <b>all activities</b> indoors or reschedule them to another day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform staff that restrictions are in place</li> <li>• Cancel all outdoor athletic activity</li> <li>• Ensure that staff are following the guidelines</li> <li>• Stay in communication with district office for changes</li> <li>• Monitor school site for concerns such as poor air filtration or leaky windows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to site concerns to support and determine severity</li> <li>• Remind site administrators of restrictions at this level</li> <li>• Consider closing schools based on site by site concerns</li> <li>• Allow excused absences for students with reported health concerns</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>Asthma Symptoms: Air pollution can make asthma symptoms worse and trigger attacks. Symptoms of asthma include coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing, and chest tightness. Even students who do not have asthma could experience these symptoms. If symptoms occur: The student might need to take a break, do a less intense activity, stop all activity, go indoors, or use quick-relief medicine as prescribed. If symptoms don't improve, get medical help.