

# Sonoma County Schools Air Quality Guidance – Updated 6/15/2021

## About the Guidelines

- These guidelines were modified from Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) and Centers for Disease Control's [Air Quality and Outdoor Activity Guidance for Schools](#) and [Wildfire Smoke: A Guide for Public Health Officials and are in accordance with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's guidelines for schools.](#)
- They were developed through a collaboration of 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.*
- Children are considered more sensitive to smoke because their developing lungs and heightened activity make them more sensitive to the impacts of smoke.
- Families always have the right to keep their children home if they are concerned for their child's health and are encouraged to talk with their child's pediatrician and school administrator/teacher if they wish to do so.

## Choosing to Use the Guidelines






- School districts will monitor the air quality index (AQI) using EPA's AQI monitoring tools at **Fire.AirNow.gov**, which aggregates data from Purpleair.com and Airnow.gov.
- School activities and closures decisions will be made based on fire.airnow.gov 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 child's health care provider.

## About Masks

- When air is unhealthy, the best protection is to reduce physical activity and stay indoors with windows and doors closed, in a location with well-filtered air. 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 limited protection from smoke. N95 respirators are designed for professional use by trained adults and are not intended for children. No N95 respirators are currently certified for use by children. There is insufficient data to support the benefit to children of prolonged use of N95 respirators in wildfire smoke events.
- While face coverings are still required for protection against COVID-19, cloth or medical procedure (surgical) masks will still provide the best protection against the virus for children and may afford SOME protection against smoke.
- 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 HEPA air filters that have medium or high efficiency. [EPA recommendations for air filtration are given here.](#)
- [Consider installing indoor air quality monitors to assess indoor air quality throughout the day.](#)
- Install portable, non-ozone-forming HEPA air purifiers in classrooms where possible. [See approved filters here.](#)
- Check manufacturer instructions to ensure that portable filters are sized correctly for the room.
- Ensure doors and windows are sealed tightly. Minimize air movement in and out of room.
- Some brief outdoor exposure during smoke events may be necessary and acceptable to transport children to and from school or in-between classes in outdoor passageways. Keep these exposures as brief as possible and consider encouraging the use of masks during these times, if appropriate.

Air Quality Index (measured at fire.airnow.gov)	Recommended School Activities	School Actions	District Actions
 <p>(0-50) GOOD</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great day to be active outside</li> <li>No restrictions on outdoor activities</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>Avoid vigorous outdoor activities and consider holding recess indoors,</li> <li>For <b>longer activities</b> such as athletic practice, take more breaks and do less intense activities.</li> <li>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/ keep medicine handy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inform staff that restrictions are in place based on recommendations</li> <li>Ensure that staff are following the guidelines</li> <li>Encourage families to carpool to reduce emissions. During COVID-19, individuals from different households should be either vaccinated or masked.</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>Move all activities indoors or reschedule them.</li> <li>Watch for symptoms and take action as needed.*</li> <li>Students with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and keep their quick-relief medication on hand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inform staff that restrictions are in place based on recommendations</li> <li>Cancel all outdoor athletic activity</li> <li>Ensure that staff are following the guidelines</li> <li>Encourage families to carpool to reduce emissions</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> <li>Encourage families to carpool to reduce emissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to school's 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> <li>Consult with local health experts as needed regarding the safety and viability of school operations</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, seek medical help.