



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Alister F. Martin, MD, MPP
Commissioner

2026 Health Alert #22: Guidance During Wildfire Smoke

Please distribute to all clinical staff in emergency medicine, family medicine, geriatrics, internal medicine, pediatrics, psychiatry, pharmacy, and primary care.

- Please consider reaching out to people with high-risk conditions and sharing this information widely
 - People should reduce time spent outdoors and strenuous activity
 - People who may be sensitive to wildfire smoke (see below) should pay attention to how they are feeling and rest or go inside if they feel the effects of poor air pollution
 - [High quality masks](#) can help but are not a substitute for staying indoors
 - People can monitor changing air quality at: [Air Now](#).
 - We are currently experiencing hot weather. Very hot weather can be more dangerous than poor air quality. When hot weather and poor air quality occur at the same time, the focus should be on avoiding hyperthermia. People can spend time in air-conditioned spaces or keep the windows open when temperatures cool down - even if it is still smoky outside.
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July 15, 2026

Dear Colleagues,

Wildfires in Canada may impact New York City air quality starting today. Air quality indices are forecasted to reach Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (orange) levels but could spike up to Unhealthy for All (red). Air quality levels may fluctuate. All New Yorkers should limit strenuous and prolonged (more than one hour) outdoor activities. Sensitive individuals should avoid unnecessary outdoor activities. Everyone should monitor the news and sign up for [Notify NYC](#) messages for updates, as conditions are changing.

Groups that may be sensitive to wildfire smoke

- People with heart or respiratory conditions, such as asthma or COPD
- People who are immunocompromised
- Older adults
- People who are pregnant
- Infants and children; especially young children with heart or respiratory conditions or who are immunocompromised
- People with social vulnerabilities, such as lack of access to safe housing or health care,

lack of transportation, and other factors

Consider speaking with the people you provide care for about preventative measures they can take to protect themselves and advise them to consult with you or their other providers if they have questions or feel ill.

Effective steps people can take to reduce the effects of wildfire smoke:

- Listen to your body. If you are feeling the effects from poor air quality like watery eyes, scratchy throat or difficulty breathing, reduce physical activity and/or go indoors.
- Very hot weather can be more dangerous than poor air quality. If you don't have AC, go to a public air-conditioned place like a library, or visit a friend or family with home AC. If you must stay home without AC, keep your windows open. Use an air purifier if you have one.
- [Wearing high-quality masks \(N-95 or KN95\)](#) can reduce smoke exposure but is not a substitute for staying indoors. Monitor changing air quality conditions on the EPA Air Now site at: <https://www.airnow.gov/>
- [Follow Health Department guidance for activity recommendations when air quality changes.](#)

AQI Value	Level	Recommendations
0 to 50	Good	A great day to be active outside.
51 to 100	Moderate	A good day to be active outside. Sensitive individuals may experience increased symptoms and should be aware and follow routine precautions to manage existing conditions.
101 to 150	Unhealthy for Sensitive Individuals	The risk of air quality-related health impacts from outdoor activities remains low for healthy people. If your eyes are watering, your throat is sore, you have a headache, or you are out of breath or coughing during outdoor activities, take a break and go indoors. Sensitive individuals should follow management plans for their health conditions, be alert for any symptoms during outdoor activities, and avoid strenuous and prolonged (more than one hour) outdoor activities.
151 to 200	Unhealthy	All New Yorkers should limit strenuous and prolonged (more than one hour) outdoor activities. Sensitive individuals should avoid unnecessary outdoor activities. Consider rescheduling or moving indoors any outdoor event expected to last more than one hour.
201 to 300	Very Unhealthy	Reschedule or move all unnecessary activities indoors. All New Yorkers should avoid strenuous and prolonged (more than one hour) outdoor activities
301 and higher	Hazardous	All New Yorkers should avoid unnecessary outdoor activities.

Please consider rescheduling appointments or using telehealth, depending on individual circumstances. Thank you for your help in keeping New Yorkers healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

Sarah Johnson

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