

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Air Quality Flag Program?

The Air Quality Flag Program alerts organizations to the local air quality forecast and helps them to take actions to protect people's health, including those with asthma. Each day your organization raises a flag that corresponds to how clean or polluted the air is.

Why is the Flag Program important?

The Flag Program creates public awareness of outdoor air quality conditions. People can continue to get plenty of physical activity, while still protecting their health from poor air quality. When air quality is unhealthy, people can modify their activities, or move them inside. Recommendations for outdoor activities on poor air quality days can be found at www.airnow.gov/flag.

What do the flag colors mean?

The Flag Program uses green, yellow, orange, red and purple flags. These colors correspond to the EPA's Air Quality Index.

What is the Air Quality Index?

The Air Quality Index is a guide for reporting daily air quality. It uses colors and numbers to show how clean or polluted the air is. EPA uses the Air Quality Index to report ground-level [ozone](#) and [particle matter](#) pollution. For each pollutant, EPA has established national standards to protect people's health. The AQI focuses on health the effects you may experience within a few hours or days after breathing polluted air.

What is the Air Quality Forecast?

The AQI forecast is the projected air quality for that day or the next day. The color of the flag you raise each day corresponds to the forecasted air quality for that day, which may not be the same as the air quality at the time when you check the forecast. For example, the air quality index in the morning might be green while the forecast for the day is yellow. That means the air quality is projected to get worse throughout the day, perhaps as a result of warm, sunny weather producing more ground-level ozone pollution as the day goes on. In this example, you would fly the yellow flag for the forecasted air quality.

How will I know what color flag to use?

Check the day's forecasted AQI at www.airnow.gov/flag/whichflag. Sign up for automatic emails (www.airnow.gov/enviroflash), download the AirNow app, or install the AirNow widget on your website.

What is the commitment if my site receives free flags?

Free flags can be provided to sites in Tennessee that agree to host the program for at least two years and complete the following:

- ✓ Raise the appropriate air quality flag as a visual indicator of air quality conditions on school days during the school year.
- ✓ Inform faculty and staff about the flag program and available materials and curriculum.
- ✓ Inform students and parents of the benefits of the flag program and the school's participation.
- ✓ Designate a school staff liaison for the flag program staff to implement the Air Quality Flag program.
- ✓ Partner with American Lung Association in Tennessee on a press release.
- ✓ Promote program participation through social media, website, and/or digital screens.

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When will I receive the flags and toolkit?

After filling out the form, a member of our team will send a short application. Once this application is completed and signed, we will send you the toolkit electronically and flag set should arrive in the mail within a week!

How should schools modify outdoor physical activity based on the flag color that day?

A green flag means it's a great day to be active outside! A yellow flag indicates that it is a good day to be active outside, but some students who are unusually sensitive to air pollution could show respiratory symptoms. An orange flag says it's OK to be outside, especially for short activities such as recess or PE class; during longer activities such as athletic practice students should take more breaks and do less intense activities. A red flag advises to take more breaks and do less intense activities for *all* outdoor activities. A purple flag indicates that all activities should be moved indoors or rescheduled for another day.

On orange, red, and purple days, you should watch for respiratory symptoms and take action as needed; students with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and keep their quick-relief medicine handy.

Why should people take breaks and participate in less intense activities when air quality is unhealthy?

More pollution enters sensitive group's lungs when they are active for a longer period of time or when they participate in more intense activities. Decreasing activity (e.g., taking breaks or walking instead of running) helps reduce intensity and the amount of time spent breathing hard.

For schools, what are some physical activities students can do inside?

Encourage indoor activities that keep all students moving. Plan activities that include aerobic exercise and involve muscle and bone strengthening components (e.g. jumping, skipping, sit-ups or pushups). If a gymnasium or open space is accessible, promote activities that use equipment, such as cones, hula-hoops and sports balls. If restricted to the classroom, encourage students to come up with fun ways to get everyone moving (e.g., act out action words from a story). Teachers and recess supervisors can work with PE teachers to identify additional indoor activities.

What respiratory symptoms should I watch for?

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.

What can I do to reduce air pollution in my community?

Actions such as the following can all help reduce air pollution in your community:

- ✓ Walk, bike, carpool or take public transit when possible.
- ✓ Adopt anti-idling policies for cars and buses at your school.
- ✓ Say "no" to backyard burning.
- ✓ Reduce, reuse, and recycle.
- ✓ Use less electricity; turn off the lights, TV, and computer when not in use and unplug appliances.
- ✓ Garden without pesticides and avoid using gas-powered lawn mowers when possible.