

News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Air Quality Health Advisory for Sensitive Groups

The Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) today issued a **health advisory for sensitive groups** because of smoke from the wildfires in Canada and the western United States. Smoke continues to move south due to southerly winds and may occasionally reach levels that are unhealthy for children, older adults and those with asthma, lung disease, other respiratory conditions or heart disease.

When the Air Quality Index (AQI) is in the ‘orange’ category, that means the air quality is unhealthy for individuals with higher sensitivity to air pollution, and those who are at risk should reduce strenuous physical activity when outdoors, take plenty of breaks and watch for symptoms such as difficulty breathing, coughing, unusual fatigue, heart palpitations, tightness in the chest, or chest pain. People who experience these symptoms should contact a medical care provider. People with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and have quick relief medicine readily available. When the AQI is in the ‘red’ category or worse, the air quality is unhealthy for everyone, and all residents should follow the guidance provided above.

Those at risk can further protect their health when air quality is poor by staying indoors, keeping windows and doors closed, using a HEPA filter, and using the “re-circulate” setting when using a vehicle air conditioner.

Smoke levels may fluctuate due to wind and weather conditions and varying smoke production by the fires, and residents should pay close attention to the Air Quality Index to stay informed of ongoing air quality conditions. SWNPHD monitors air quality 24 hours a day, which can be viewed on our website www.swhealth.ne.gov under Environmental Health. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also provides the ‘AirNow’ and ‘SmokeSense’ smart phone apps to help people stay informed of the AQI in their area. These tools also provide guidance on what precautions people should take when heading outdoors.

For more information about air quality contact SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. The website swhealth.ne.gov contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok.

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Air Quality Index

AQI Category and Color	Index Value	Description of Air Quality
Good Green	0 to 50	Air quality is satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk.
Moderate Yellow	51 to 100	Air quality is acceptable. However, there may be a risk for some people, particularly those who are unusually sensitive to air pollution.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups Orange	101 to 150	Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. The general public is less likely to be affected.
Unhealthy Red	151 to 200	Some members of the general public may experience health effects; members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.
Very Unhealthy Purple	201 to 300	Health alert: The risk of health effects is increased for everyone.
Hazardous Maroon	301 and higher	Health warning of emergency conditions: everyone is more likely to be affected.