

About the New Air Quality Health Index in Saint John

The new national Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) is a tool that lets you know the level of air pollution in relation to the risk it poses to your health. You can help protect your health by following the advice provided by the AQHI. To find out what the number is today and the forecast for tomorrow, you can go to www.airhealth.ca / www.aircotesante.ca, or call 1-888-484-2744 (1-888-484-AQHI).

- The Air Quality Health Index gives you a number from 1-10. The higher the number, the greater the risk of health impacts from air pollution.
- The AQHI provides advice on ways you can protect your health if you are sensitive to air pollution as well as advice for the general population.
- As well, the AQHI provides tips on how you can take personal actions to reduce air pollutants in the air.

What is “new” about the new Air Quality Health Index?

This new Index provides advice based on health risk of exposure to air pollution. Other Indices have usually been based on the official air quality standards set by the government. It is calculated based on your risk if you are exposed to up to three pollutants.

Many other indices are based on one or two pollutants. It is anticipated that this Index will be used across Canada so that you can see the same basic type of information in Vancouver, Saint John or Iqaluit.

What is air pollution?

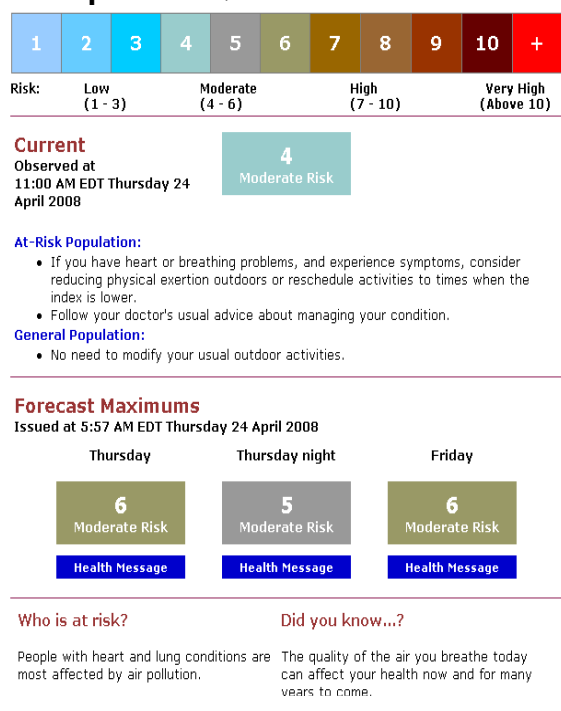
Air pollution is a mixture of gases and particles (soot) that come from industries, vehicles, wood stoves and other sources. These are in the air and carried on the wind, sometimes from sources far away. The Air Quality Health Index is measured based on the amounts of Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}), ground-level Ozone (O₃) and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) in the air. These three substances were found to significantly affect health in a Health Canada study of health effects of air pollution in 8 major Canadian cities.

How do these pollutants affect my health?

Air pollutants irritate your eyes, nose, lungs and even your blood vessels. Symptoms range from coughing and itchy eyes, to increasing difficulty breathing, tiredness and chest pains. Some health effects occur immediately when you are exposed, other health effects occur after long-term exposure. Children growing up in heavily polluted areas develop smaller lungs than normal.



Example of AQHI Information:



How do I know if I am sensitive to air pollution?

People who have pre-existing lung or heart conditions, diabetics, young children, the elderly and people working or playing hard outdoors are more susceptible to the effects of air pollution than most other people. Everyone can feel some health effects if the pollution levels are very high.

The AQHI encourages everyone to make note of the Index number each day and to monitor how they feel at each number. Since different people react differently to pollution you should learn what each number means to you so that you can manage your own health.

What should I do to protect my health when the Air Quality Health Index number rises?

The AQHI provides general advice for both sensitive people and for the general population. If you notice that you have symptoms you should:

- Limit your exposure to outdoor air and reduce your activity level
- Resume your usual activities when the air quality improves.
- Follow the advice of your doctor.

If you look after young children, people with lung or heart illnesses or the elderly, watch their symptoms and help them to take the recommended actions.

About the AQHI in Saint John

The AQHI is being implemented in Saint John in 2008/2009. It will be available in other locations in New Brunswick in following years.



Many people in Saint John know that there is a problem with sulphur in the air from time to time; it is easily identified by its smell! The AQHI does not include sulphur because scientific studies have found a relatively low contribution to serious health effects from sulphur, compared with the health effects arising from the three pollutants in the index. Saint John will be the test site for exploring how to best deliver a separate alert system for days when sulphur levels are high.

Sulphur dioxide can cause some health effects. If you smell sulphur, and you believe that it is making you ill - follow the AQHI advice and reduce your exposure to outdoor air and reduce your activity level.

Enjoy the many “Low Risk” days

Most days in Saint John will have a Low Risk AQHI value. For most people these are great days to get outside and be active!

You can help improve the quality of air

Reduce your use of motor vehicles. Reduce your use of electricity. Reduce, reuse, recycle and lower your environmental footprint.



The introduction of the Air Quality Health Index in Saint John is an initiative between Environment Canada, Health Canada and the New Brunswick Department of Health and Department of Environment in association with the New Brunswick Lung Association.