

AQI:

The AQI is an index for reporting daily air quality. It tells you how clean or polluted your air is, and what associated health effects might be a concern for you. The AQI focuses on health effects you may experience within a few hours or days after breathing polluted air. EPA calculates the AQI for five major air pollutants regulated by the Clean Air Act: ground-level ozone, particle pollution (also known as particulate matter), carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. For each of these pollutants, EPA has established national air quality standards to protect public health. Ground-level ozone and airborne particles are the two pollutants that pose the greatest threat to human health in this country. However, these findings are limited to the measurement and recording tactics of the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

Since 2013, Idaho has experienced increasing levels of unhealthy air quality. When the AQI is above 100, agencies have to report which groups, such as children, elderly people, or people with asthma or heart disease, may be sensitive to that pollutant. In 2017, 19% of the year exposed Idahoans to AQI levels over 100, one of which containing “Hazardous” levels of pollution.

The major human health effects of exposure to unhealthy air quality includes damaging the respiratory system, reducing lung function, inflammation and damage to the lungs, increased susceptibility to infection, aggravate asthma, aggravate other chronic lung diseases such as emphysema and bronchitis, and permanent lung damage.

This is not just a concern for sensitive groups of Idaho’s population, but for us who enjoy living active lifestyles and spending quality time outdoors. According to the EPA, active people of all ages who exercise or work outdoors are at increased risk. Limiting prolonged and heavy exertion is the only way to avoid being exposed to unhealthy air. This becomes especially problematic in places like Idaho, where quality of life goes hand in hand with access to the outdoors.

