Guidance Concerning Air Quality

Poor air quality caused by wildfire smoke and other pollutants can irritate your lungs, cause inflammation, affect your immune system, and make you more prone to lung infections. Learn how you can track air quality and prepare your family and school for days when air quality is poor.

**Keep Track of Air Quality**

The following sites track air quality data using professional quality monitors that are regularly maintained, independently audited, and have high standards for quality assurance and quality control.

- Bay Area Air Quality Management District
- AirNow (Environmental Protection Agency)

**When Outdoor Air Quality is Poor**

Schools are the best place for students to be when air quality is poor as they are well-supervised, can be kept indoors, and are able to continue to learn.

**Indoor Ventilation During COVID-19**

Follow these recommendations for creating clean air space that reduces the risk of transmitting COVID-19.

- If HVAC filter was upgraded (HEPA or MERV-13 or higher is recommended), set the central system’s circulating fan to operate continuously (set to “ON” rather than “AUTO”).
- Maintain outdoor air rates at 15 CFM per person.
- Note: closing outdoor air dampers is unsafe when COVID spread is of concern.
- HVAC, air conditioning wall units, and fans without upgraded filters should be turned off.
- Use a portable air cleaner in one or more rooms. Portable air cleaners work best when run continuously with doors and windows closed.
- When air quality improves, even temporarily, “air out” buildings to reduce indoor air pollution.

**Sensitive Groups**

Children with certain medical conditions may be impacted by air quality in the moderate (yellow – 51-100) and unhealthy for sensitive groups (orange – 101-150) levels. Parents/guardians of these children should notify their schools.

**Very Unhealthy Air** (Purple, 201-300)

When air quality reaches very unhealthy levels, many schools in San Mateo County will practice the Shelter in Place protocol, which includes keeping all activities indoors, limiting physical activity, and minimizing the opening and closing of doors. Regular classroom instruction continues during Shelter in Place. Consider closing when AQI hits 250+.

**Hazardous Air** (Maroon, 301-500)

If air quality becomes hazardous and schools do not have the ability to keep outdoor air from easily entering the school, then a school may decide to close. Schools make this decision based on their own local factors.

**Additional Resources**

- School Air Quality Activity Recommendations
- San Mateo County Office of Education Air Quality Resources
- Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities Facilities Report (pages 10-11)
- San Mateo County Pandemic Recovery Framework