

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.

AQI SCALE KEY:



Keep Track of Air Quality

The [Bay Area Air Quality Management District website](#) (BAAQMD) has local information and projections.

The EPA's [AirNow website](#) provides a quick update on air quality. Here are links to pages covering [South](#) and [North](#) San Mateo County.

The County Office of Education and San Mateo County Health use these official BAAQMD and AirNow sites to track data because they rely on professional quality monitors that are regularly maintained, independently audited, and have high standards for quality assurance and quality control.

Adjust Activity Based on Air Quality

[School Air Quality Activity Recommendations](#)

This document, developed with content from the California Department of Education and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), is geared toward schools. However, it also provides families with insight into how schools might address differing levels of air quality.

[All Children Are Included in Sensitive Group](#)

According to the CDPH, all children are considered “sensitive individuals” and may be impacted by air quality in the Moderate (yellow – 51-100) and Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (orange – 101-150) levels.

School Response

When air quality dips to Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups levels (orange – 101-150), schools in San Mateo County should have all students exercise indoors and limit vigorous outdoor activities.

When air quality dips to Unhealthy levels (red – 151-200), schools in San Mateo County should practice the [Big Five 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.

The Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities believes that 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. However, if air quality becomes Hazardous (maroon – 301-500) 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 equity and access to education for all students and their own local factors.

To learn more about the Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities' recommendations for preparing for unhealthy air quality, see [pages 10-11 of its Facilities Report](#). For guidance on school closures, refer to the [Decision Making Guide for School Closures](#).