

# Air Quality Model Policy Toolkit

Example Language for Schools and Organizations Serving Children



**love my air** WI

  
WISCONSIN  
**ASTHMA**  
COALITION  
★ Children's Health  
Alliance of Wisconsin

 **WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT**  
*of* **HEALTH SERVICES**

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## Air Quality Model Policy Toolkit

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**Purpose:** Poor air quality can lead to a wide range of health conditions and impact the comfort, focus and work of staff and students. Wildfire smoke events and ozone alert days are getting more common. It is important to have a plan to protect staff and student health.

**How to use this toolkit:** This toolkit has templates to help you create plans that will protect student health when air quality is poor. Please review each template carefully and modify the sample language as appropriate for your school. Please ensure that your school has everything necessary to implement the policy.

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### Template for athletics

Anytime an air quality alert is issued, [school/school district] will follow [air quality index](#) (AQI) health advice from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to adjust athletic events.

Current air quality can be found at [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov).

The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) gives detailed guidance for athletes in its booklet, "[Medical Policies and Procedures](#)" (pages 34-35).

### Template for communication to parents and guardians from administration

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I hope this message finds you well. As you may know, our area is having poor air quality due to wildfire smoke. The health and safety of our students and staff is our main priority. We check the outdoor air quality daily, and when it reaches unhealthy levels, all outdoor events will be moved indoors.

#### Key actions in our wildfire smoke plan:

1. **Indoor air quality:** We are keeping all windows closed to prevent smoke from entering the building. External doors have signs asking to keep doors closed as much as possible. We are using movable high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter air cleaners in classrooms where we have them.
2. **Outdoor events:** All outdoor events, including recess and physical education, will be moved indoors when outdoor air quality becomes unhealthy. We also ask parents to find other ways to get students to school if they normally walk or bike.
3. **Children at higher risk:** All children ages infant to 17 are more sensitive to air pollution because their lungs are still growing, and they may have a hidden health condition. Students with breathing conditions such as asthma may be more affected by the smoke. Please make sure your child has their needed medications and tell the school if they need extra help.

#### How you can help:

- **Stay informed:** Keep track of local air quality reports and follow any more advice from health officials. For current air quality levels, visit [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov). For more information about air quality and health risks, visit the [Wisconsin Department of Health Services' Outdoor Air Quality and Health webpage](#).
- **Prepare your child:** Make sure your child knows how important it is to stay indoors and follow school rules during this time.
- **Health safety steps:** If your child has trouble breathing, coughing or other signs of illness, please get medical care right away.

We value your support and collaboration as we work together to keep all students safe and healthy at school during periods of unhealthy air quality.

Thank you for your support.

Best regards,  
[Your Name] [Title]

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## Template for parent and student handbook

### Outdoor air quality

To keep everyone safe, [the district] will check air quality and use the air quality index (AQI) for information and guidance.

Current air quality can be found at [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov).

When there is an air quality alert, [school district] will follow health advice to decide about school events, sports and after-school events.

**AQI outdoor health and safety advice** (click the image below for PDF):

**Understanding Air Quality Index Levels**  
Outdoor health and safety recommendations for schools, school sports, child care, and day camps.

AQI 0-50 Good	AQI 51-100 Moderate	AQI 101-150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups	AQI 151-200 Unhealthy for everyone	AQI 201-300 Very unhealthy for everyone	AQI 301-500 Hazardous for everyone
<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> No one <b>What should I do?</b> No limits, it's a great day to be active outside. Be aware of changing air quality.	<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> Children who are unusually sensitive to particle pollution, particularly those with asthma. <b>What should I do?</b> <b>Unusually sensitive people:</b> Consider making outdoor activities shorter or choose less intense activities. Monitor children and teens for symptoms, such as coughing or shortness of breath. Ensure students with asthma follow their asthma action plans and medically manage their condition according to their plan. Monitor the AQI forecasts. <b>Everyone else:</b> It's a good day to be active outside.	<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> Sensitive groups such as babies, children, and teenagers, especially those with heart or lung diseases like asthma. <b>What should I do?</b> <b>Sensitive groups:</b> Make indoor space (with air filtration) available and/or make indoor activity options available. Children with asthma should follow asthma action plans and medically manage their condition. <b>Everyone else:</b> All children should do shorter and less intense activities to lower breathing rates, and watch for symptoms like coughing or shortness of breath. For longer activities increase rest periods and substitutions to lower athletes' breathing rates.	<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> Everyone, the AQI is unhealthy for all people. <b>What should I do?</b> Consider moving all activities to an indoors location with air filtration. Limit outdoor activities for all students, children and teens. Watch students for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. Students with asthma should follow asthma action plans, stay indoors and have their medicines with them or a designated adult.	<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> Everyone, the AQI is very unhealthy for all people. <b>What should I do?</b> Cancel all outdoor activities. Move all activities indoors and substitute with shorter, less intense options. Any outdoor sports practices or events should be rescheduled, moved indoors to a space with air filtration, or canceled. When outdoors, consider wearing an N95 mask to filter fine particle pollution (PM2.5).	<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> Everyone, the AQI is very unhealthy for all people. <b>What should I do?</b> Cancel all outdoors activities. Reschedule or cancel any outdoor sports practices or events. Indoor activities should be kept at low intensity and frequency, especially for students with asthma. Avoid outdoor air exposure until air quality has returned to safer levels. If people cannot avoid outdoor air exposure, an N95 mask may be helpful to filter fine particles (PM2.5) when outdoors.

For current air quality conditions, visit the [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources \(DNR\) air quality map](#) by scanning the QR code or visit [airquality.wi.gov](http://airquality.wi.gov).

Note: Masks cannot filter ground-level ozone pollution, only particulate matter (PM2.5).

For air quality-based health advice, visit the Wisconsin Department of Health Services [Air Quality Recommendations](#) webpage.

**Note:** *Sensitive groups* means people who can be hurt more by unhealthy air. This includes children, older adults, pregnant women and people with health conditions like asthma or heart disease.

# Air Quality Model Policy Toolkit

## Template for school district policy

The [insert name of school district] Board of Education knows that healthy air is vital for healthy kids. We are focused on providing healthy learning and working spaces for our students and staff. Unhealthy air (both indoors and outdoors) contains pollutants that can lead to health issues. These health issues can cause lower engagement in the classroom, missed school days for students and missed work for their caregivers.

Children and people with chronic diseases like asthma are more likely to feel sick from unhealthy air. Children are hurt more by air pollution than adults because they breathe faster, and their bodies are still growing.<sup>1</sup> Asthma is a chronic lung disease and it is the most common chronic disease in children. Over half a million children and adults in Wisconsin have asthma.<sup>2</sup> In [insert school district name], about [insert asthma rate] of students have asthma.

To protect the health and safety of our students and staff, [insert school district name] will promote checking air quality and using tools that help school staff make informed choices when the air quality index (AQI) moves beyond the green (good) zone. This plan allows school staff to move, reschedule, shorten or cancel outdoor events when the AQI is not safe. Choices that involve changing student actions to limit time spent in spaces with poor air quality will be made based on the AQI advice.

**AQI outdoor health and safety advice** (click the image below for PDF):

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<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> No one	<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> Children who are unusually sensitive to particle pollution, particularly those with asthma.	<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> Sensitive groups such as babies, children, and teenagers, especially those with heart or lung diseases like asthma.	<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> Everyone, the AQI is unhealthy for all people.	<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> Everyone, the AQI is very unhealthy for all people.	<b>Who needs to be concerned?</b> Everyone, the AQI is very unhealthy for all people.
<b>What should I do?</b> No limits, it's a great day to be active outside. Be aware of changing air quality.	<b>What should I do?</b> <b>Unusually sensitive people:</b> Consider making outdoor activities shorter or choose less intense activities. Monitor children and teens for symptoms, such as coughing or shortness of breath. Ensure students with asthma follow their asthma action plans and medically manage their condition according to their plan. Monitor the AQI forecasts. <b>Everyone else:</b> It's a good day to be active outside.	<b>What should I do?</b> <b>Sensitive groups:</b> Make indoor space (with air filtration) available and/or make indoor activity options available for symptoms, such as coughing or shortness of breath. Children with asthma should follow asthma action plans and medically manage their condition. <b>Everyone else:</b> All children should do shorter and less intense activities to lower breathing rates, and watch for symptoms like coughing or shortness of breath. For longer activities increase rest periods and substitutions to lower athletes' breathing rates.	<b>What should I do?</b> Consider moving all activities to an indoors location with air filtration. Limit outdoor activities for all students, children and teens. Watch students for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. Students with asthma should follow asthma action plans, stay indoors and have their medicines with them or a designated adult.	<b>What should I do?</b> Cancel all outdoor activities. Move all substitute with shorter, less intense options. Any outdoor sports practices or events should be rescheduled, moved indoors to a space with air filtration, or canceled. When outdoors, consider wearing an N95 mask to filter fine particle pollution (PM2.5).	<b>What should I do?</b> Cancel all outdoor activities. Reschedule or cancel any outdoor sports practices or events. Indoor activities should be kept at low intensity and frequency, especially for students with asthma. Avoid outdoor air exposure until air quality has returned to safer levels. If people cannot avoid outdoor air exposure, an N95 mask may be helpful to filter fine particles (PM2.5) when outdoors.

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# Air Quality Model Policy Toolkit

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## Effective date

This policy shall take effect in full on [INSERT DATE].

## Definitions

For this policy, key words are defined below.

- The **air quality index (AQI)** is a tool for telling people about outdoor air quality and health. It uses numbers and colors to explain what the six levels mean. For more information about AQI, visit [AirNow's Air Quality Index \(AQI\) Basics webpage](#).
- **Sensitive groups** means people who are more at risk of the harmful effects of air pollution. This includes children, older adults, pregnant women and people with health conditions like asthma or heart disease.
- **Asthma** is a chronic lung disease. It makes it hard for someone to breathe and can be deadly. Three things happen in the airways of someone with asthma:
  1. Their airways get swollen.
  2. The muscles around the airways tighten and cause the airways to narrow.
  3. Mucus fills the airways.

Asthma symptoms include wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath and coughing.

## References

1. Wu IP, Liao SL, Lai SH, Wong KS. The respiratory impacts of air pollution in children: Global and domestic (Taiwan) situation. *Biomed J.* 2022 Feb;45(1):88-94. doi: 10.1016/j.bj.2021.12.004. Epub 2021 Dec 17. PMID: 34929408; PMCID: PMC9133359.
2. <https://www.chawisconsin.org/initiatives/environmental-health/wisconsin-asthma-coalition/>

### Template for school improvement plan and school health plan

#### **Goal**

By the end of the \_\_\_ school year, [school name] students will learn about air quality and how it affects people's health by taking part in the Love My Air Wisconsin (LMA WI) program.

#### **Strategy**

[School name] will choose at least one contact person to work with LMA WI staff and lead air quality education with students and families. [School] will complete a public awareness campaign, with LMA WI support, to help students, staff and community members learn about air quality and how it affects health.

#### **Indicator**

[School] uses tools given by LMA WI (such as the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] Flag Program, No Idle campaign and a LMA WI lesson or activity) at least one time throughout the school year.

#### **Measure or evidence**

It is best to use a feedback form before and after the plan is used to find out if knowledge has changed. LMA WI staff can provide a template form.

#### **When will work be completed?**

Throughout the school year.

#### **Persons responsible**

LMA WI staff, school staff member and students.

[Contact LMA WI](#) for support to create your school's plan.

## Contacts and support

If you would like more information or support, contact the following programs:

**Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin**

Sarah Kroening, MspEd – Love My Air Wisconsin Program Manager

[SKroening@childrenswi.org](mailto:SKroening@childrenswi.org) | 414-266-9730

**Wisconsin Department of Health Services Asthma Program**

Cristine Rameker, MPH – Asthma Program Manager

[Cristine.rameker@dhs.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Cristine.rameker@dhs.wisconsin.gov) | 608-267-6845

**Wisconsin Department of Health Services Climate & Health Program**

[DHSClimate@dhs.wisconsin.gov](mailto:DHSClimate@dhs.wisconsin.gov) | 608-266-1120