

# Protect Your Health



North Carolina Public Health  
Working for a healthier and safer North Carolina  
Everywhere. Everyday. Everybody.

## *How Older Adults can Protect Themselves from Air Pollution and Heat*

Both air pollution and heat can cause health effects, particularly to sensitive groups such as older adults.

### **Air Pollution and Health Effects**

In North Carolina, two major types of air pollution are particulate matter and ground-level ozone. Particulate matter is a mixture of microscopic solids and liquid droplets suspended in the air. Ground-level ozone is a highly reactive form of oxygen that is formed when pollutants react chemically with the presence of sunlight. Exposure to particulate matter and ground-level ozone can cause varying health effects, including irritation of eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and aggravation of respiratory diseases. Long-term exposure can reduce lung function. For more information please visit: <http://www.ncair.org/airaware/knowthecode/>

### **Heat**

In North Carolina, extreme heat is a concern. Over 2,000 people visit emergency departments each year for heat illness. High heat and humidity can cause the body to work extra hard to maintain a normal body temperature. This slows down evaporation sweat, causing your body to overheat. High heat days cause changes in the environment and can contribute to poor air quality, putting vulnerable populations at risk. For more information, please visit: <http://publichealth.nc.gov/chronicdiseaseandinjury/heat.htm>



# TIPS TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH

- Plan outdoor activities for the morning and early evening.
- Adjust when and where you exercise, as ozone pollution tends to be greatest during the hottest parts of the day.
- Reduce activity that requires heavy exertion to one with moderate exertion (i.e. walk rather than run).
- **KNOW THE CODE!** Check the daily air quality forecast (code) when you will be going outside.



Air Quality Index	Meaning
Good	Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no concern. Go outside and enjoy the day!
Moderate	There may be a moderate health concern for people who are unusually sensitive to air pollution.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	Older adults, children, active people and those with heart or lung disease may experience health effects. Limit prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors.
Unhealthy	Older adults, children, active people and those with heart or lung disease may experience more serious health effects. Everyone may experience health effects. Limit prolonged or heavy exertion outdoors.
Very Unhealthy	Everyone is likely to be affected. Avoid all outdoors exertion.



Get the daily forecast at 1-800-RU4NCAIR (784-6224) or [www.ncair.org](http://www.ncair.org).