

News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Public Encouraged to Monitor Air Quality

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) encourages residents to monitor the Air Quality Index (AQI) during the next several days to determine if levels of smoke in the air are unhealthy. Smoke from the Canadian wildfires continues to move south due to southerly winds and may cause unhealthy levels of smoke in southwest Nebraska. Resources are available through the health department or the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to check local air quality.

Smoke from controlled burning and wildfires can cause health issues, especially for children, older adults and those with asthma, lung disease, other respiratory conditions, or heart disease. Those at risk are encouraged to check the AQI regularly.

When the AQI is in the ‘orange’ category, that means the air quality is unhealthy for individuals with higher sensitivity to air pollution, and those who are at risk should avoid strenuous or prolonged outdoor activities, take plenty of breaks and watch for symptoms such as difficulty breathing, coughing, unusual fatigue, heart palpitations, tightness in the chest, or chest pain. People who experience any of these symptoms should contact a medical care provider. People with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and have quick relief medicine readily available.

When the AQI is in the ‘red’ category or worse, the air quality is unhealthy for everyone, and all residents should follow the guidance provided above.

Those at risk can further protect their health when air quality is poor by staying indoors, keeping windows and doors closed, using a HEPA filter, and using the “re-circulate” setting for their vehicle air conditioner.

Smoke levels may fluctuate due to wind and weather conditions and varying smoke production by the fires, and residents should pay close attention to the Air Quality Index (AQI) to stay informed of ongoing air quality conditions. SWNPHD monitors air quality 24 hours per day which can be viewed on our website at www.swhealth.ne.gov under Environmental Health. Additionally, the EPA provides the ‘AirNow’ and ‘SmokeSense’ smartphone apps to help people stay informed of the AQI in their area. These tools also provide guidance on what precautions people should take when heading outdoors.

For more information about air quality contact SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. The website swhealth.ne.gov contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok.

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