PROSPECT RIDGE ACADEMY ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT

AIR QUALITY INDEX AND EXERCISE POLICY (Updated 8/2026)

Athletes are at special risk of inhaling air pollutants during exercise. The two key pollutants that may exacerbate asthma or affect lungs during exercise are ozone and particle pollution. Smoke from late summer forest and grass fires is a special concern in Colorado, often causing severe air pollution with the beginning of fall sports season. Increases in respirations during exercise result in the intake of 10 to 20 times the normal volume of air per minute. A larger fraction of air is inhaled through the mouth during exercise, bypassing nasal filtration. Increased velocity of respiration forces air deeper into the lungs.

Suggestions guidelines for managing potential air quality problems:

- Distance runners should avoid running next to busy roadways.
- Ozone exposure can be lessened by early morning workouts.
- Athletes with asthma must be carefully monitored when AQI is above 100 and have a rescue inhaler should be readily available. Asthma symptoms may not worsen until the following day after exposure to air pollution.
- **Practices and competitions should be modified or moved indoors when AQI is above 100 and consideration given to rescheduling or moving them when AQI is greater than 200. Information and Charts provided by Colorado Department of Health and Environment**

To check Air Quality Index in your area go to www.airnow.gov/

The AQI is an index for reporting daily air quality. It tells you how clean or polluted your air is, and what associated health effects might be a concern for you. The AQI focuses on health affects you may experience within a few hours or days after breathing polluted air.

EPA calculates the AQI for five major air pollutants regulated by the Clean Air Act: **ground-level ozone, particle pollution (also known as particulate matter), carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide**. For each of these pollutants, EPA has established national air quality standards to protect public health. Ground- level ozone and airborne particles are the two pollutants that pose the greatest threat to human health in this country.

How Does the AQI Work?

Think of the AQI as a yardstick that runs from 0 to 500. The higher the AQI value, the greater the level of air pollution and the greater the health concern. For example, an AQI value of 50 represents good air quality with little potential to affect public health, while an AQI value over 300 represents hazardous air quality. An AQI value of 100 generally corresponds to the national air quality standard for the pollutant, which is the level EPA has set to protect public health. AQI values below 100 are generally thought of as satisfactory. When AQI values are above 100, air quality is considered to be unhealthy-at first for certain sensitive groups of people, then for everyone as AQI values get higher.

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Air Quality Index	Who Needs to be Concerned?	What Should I Do?
Good 0-50	It's a great day to be active outside.	
Moderate 51-100	Some people who may be unusually sensitive to particle pollution.	**Unusually sensitive people:** *Consider reducing* prolonged or heavy exertion. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. These are signs to take it easier. **Everyone else:** It's a good day to be active outside.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups 101-150	Sensitive groups include **people with heart or lung disease, older adults, children and teenagers.**	**Sensitive groups:** *Reduce* prolonged or heavy exertion. It's OK to be active outside, but take more breaks and do less intense activities. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. **People with asthma** should follow their asthma action plans and keep quick relief medicine handy. **If you have heart disease:** Symptoms such as palpitations, shortness of breath, or unusual fatigue may indicate a serious problem. If you have any of these, contact your heath care provider.
Unhealthy 151 to 200	**Everyone**	**Sensitive groups:** *Avoid* prolonged or heavy exertion. Move activities indoors or reschedule to a time when the air quality is better. **Everyone else:** *Reduce* prolonged or heavy exertion. Take more breaks during all outdoor activities.
Very Unhealthy 201-300	**Everyone**	**Sensitive groups:** *Avoid all* physical activity outdoors. Move activities indoors or reschedule to a time when air quality is better. **Everyone else:** *Avoid* prolonged or heavy exertion. Consider moving activities indoors or rescheduling to a time when air quality is better.
Hazardous 301-500	**Everyone**	**Everyone**: *Avoid all* physical activity outdoors. **Sensitive groups:** Remain indoors and keep activity levels low. Follow tips for keeping particle levels low indoors.