

Lowering your risk from air pollution



Asthma + Lung UK Patient Information Leaflet – used with permission

Find out what you can do to lower your risk from air pollution, including checking pollution alerts, and what steps you can take yourself to lower air pollution levels.

Where is air pollution worse?

Higher levels of air pollution are generally found in towns and cities, where there's more road traffic. If you walk or drive on main roads to get to work or school, you'll be exposed to pollution on a daily basis.

A lot of pollution is also produced around building sites, factories, power stations, airports and docks.

In the countryside, farming can also create air pollution, and ozone levels are higher in the countryside too. In areas where people use wood burning stoves, or coal fires in their homes, this also adds to air pollution.

Fine particulate matter can travel long distances. Saharan dust can be carried over to the UK on high winds, causing poor air quality here, and resulting in health alerts for people with asthma and other lung conditions.

The weather affects pollution levels

Pollution levels can be higher when the air is still.

In summer, air pollution levels are often high on hot, sunny days.

If you're affected by weather and pollution, try using an app or website which gives you daily forecasts of both, such as BBC Weather: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/weather>, the Met Office: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/>, or Defra <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk>.

Top tips for high pollution days

1. Limit outdoor activities and exercise so you avoid breathing in too much polluted air.
2. Go out earlier in the day when air quality tends to be better.
3. Stay on quieter, back streets if possible, avoiding areas where there's a lot of traffic.
4. Walk on the inside of the pavement because pollution levels are lower the further you are from the traffic.
5. Keep your car windows closed if you're driving, especially if you're driving in slow-moving traffic.
6. Be prepared by checking pollution levels in your area. Defra produces a UK-wide pollution forecast every day and for the next five days, so you can check to see if your local area is likely to be affected.

Carry your reliever inhaler with you

If you have a reliever (or rescue) inhaler, make sure you always have it with you, so you can use it quickly if your symptoms get worse.

If you're using your reliever inhaler more than usual, follow your action plan, and talk to your GP or asthma nurse.

Does wearing a mask help when pollution levels are high?

Wearing a mask is not included in Defra's recommended actions and health advice for dealing with air pollution.

Masks with active charcoal filters can help filter out nitrogen dioxide, but these don't keep out the smallest particulate matter, which is most damaging to your health.

We know that some people with lung conditions find that face masks make it harder to breathe.

Check pollution levels near you

UK wide

Defra's Daily Air Quality Index (DAQI) tells you whether pollution levels are low, moderate, high or very high near you. See an up-to-date pollution forecast for your area: <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk>

You can also get air pollution updates on the [@DefraUKAir X](#) feed or by calling the Defra helpline on: 0800 55 66 77.

What you can do to lower air pollution

Asthma + Lung UK is campaigning for cleaner air. You can join their campaign and help everyone breathe cleaner air: <https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/support-us/campaign-with-us/clean-air-campaigns>

We can all try and help the quality of the air we breathe by:

- Using public transport instead of driving when we can.
- Walking or cycling, if possible, particularly for short trips. This will cut down air pollution and keep us active too. Asthma + Lung UK is campaigning for people with lung conditions who find it difficult to walk or cycle to have access to cleaner cars and good public transport.
- Not idling while stationary if we're driving. This means not leaving the engine going when you're pulled in somewhere.
- Buying cars with lower emissions.
- Getting cars serviced regularly, including checking the tyres.
- Avoiding using wood burning stoves or other fossil fuels for heating.

If you have a child or children at school, you could talk to the school about anti-idling zones, car sharing or park and stride schemes.

Why not encourage your child's school to join the Asthma + Lung UK Clean Air Champions Scheme?

If you're worried about pollution in your local area, you can contact the environmental health department of your local authority.

Read the Asthma + Lung UK report on air pollution:

The Invisible Threat <https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/support-us/campaign-with-us/clean-air-campaigns>

Alerting the Nation

https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/sites/default/files/Alerting%20the%20Nation%20Report_v4.pdf

Department address and contact information: Department of Respiratory Medicine:

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham
Mindlesohn Way
Birmingham B15 2WB

Birmingham Heartlands Hospital
Bordesley Green East
Birmingham B9 5SS

Good Hope Hospital
Rectory Road
Sutton Coldfield
Birmingham B75 7RR

Respiratory Outpatients' clinics are also located at:

Solihull Hospital
Lode Lane
Solihull B91 2JL

Birmingham Chest Clinic
151 Great Charles Street
Queensway
Birmingham B3 3HX

Accessibility

To view this information in a different language or use text-to-speech reader visit **www.uhb.nhs.uk**, click the yellow and black circular icon in the bottom right of the web page to open the ReachDeck toolbar and then use the search bar to search by the name of the leaflet. If you require this information in another format such as braille, please email **interpreting.service@uhb.nhs.uk**.



How did we do? 😊 😐 😞

If you have recently used our services we'd love to hear about your experience. Please scan the QR code or follow the link to share your feedback to help us improve our services. **Thank you. www.uhb.nhs.uk/fft**

