

Public Health Alert: Air Pollution in Midlands Towns

The Department of Public Health urges the public to take steps to reduce their exposure to air pollution and, where possible, to burn less solid fuel.

In recent days, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has again recorded air quality levels as being poor or very poor in several towns in the Midlands. These current poor air quality readings are likely due to a combination of factors including the burning of solid fuels in homes, and the recent cold calm weather conditions which can keep air pollution close to the ground.

Exposure to very high levels of air pollution can cause acute health problems – particularly for people who have heart conditions or lung conditions such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Air quality is more likely to be poor on cold calm winter evenings. People may notice the air is visibly polluted or smells smoky at times - this is an indicator of poor air quality. People can check the formal air quality readings in their area using the EPA website. When people are aware of an air quality issue, they can protect themselves by taking simple steps to reduce their exposure.

When air quality readings are poor:

- Adults and children with lung problems, adults with heart problems, and older people should **reduce** strenuous physical activity, particularly outdoors, and particularly if they experience symptoms.

When air quality readings are very poor:

- Adults and children with lung problems, adults with heart problems, and older people, should **avoid** strenuous physical activity.

Dr Ciara Conlan, Specialist Registrar in Public Health Medicine said *‘People with lung and heart problems, children and older people are at higher risk of having health problems when the air quality is poor. Taking simple steps such as reducing or avoiding strenuous outdoor activities when air pollution is high, for example on these very cold winter evenings, can reduce your exposure to air pollution.’*

Dr Ann Marie Murray, Specialist Registrar in Public Health Medicine said *‘It is important for people to keep warm in the winter and people need to carefully consider how best to heat their homes. The HSE website provides tips for keeping warm at home. People can play their part in reducing air pollution in their community by avoiding using solid fuels if they have an alternative cleaner heating system such as central heating. However, if people have no choice other than burning solid fuel they could consider burning less smoky fuel options, particularly on cold calm evenings.’*

The public can reduce their exposure to air pollution by following the outlined health advice when air quality is poor. People can also help to improve air quality where they live by avoiding burning smoky fuels where possible.

Links:

- Tips for keeping warm in winter: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/winter/keeping-warm-in-winter/>
- Air quality readings in your area: <https://airquality.ie/stations>
- Health advice based on air quality: <https://airquality.ie/information/air-quality-index-for-health>
- Improving air quality in our home heating choices: <https://www.epa.ie/environment-and-you/air/resources/airqualityhomeheatinginfohpic-2022.php>
- The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications’ “Let’s clear the air” at gov.ie - [Let's clear the air \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie)

Ends.

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