



Suggestions for how to implement Guidance for Georgia Schools: Outdoor Air Quality & Physical Activity

Why is Guidance for Georgia Schools needed?

Georgia school systems offer opportunities for outdoor recess, physical education classes, and athletics for many reasons, including the benefit of regular movement in optimizing learning for many children, the health benefits associated with regular exercise, and the personal and social rewards of athletic competition. However, as a growing number of Georgia school systems are located in areas that fail federal standards for air quality, school administrators need to monitor smog alerts and make appropriate adjustments in outdoor activities when air quality is poor.

How many “bad air” days are we likely to have?

In 2007 the 20-county metro Atlanta area experienced 29 days when ozone concentrations were unhealthy and 24 days when fine particle pollution (PM) concentrations exceeded the federal limit. Athens, Augusta, Columbus, Macon and Savannah experienced between 7 and 17 days each when air pollution was a health concern.

As the result of scientific studies showing damage from ozone at lower levels than the federal limit, in March 2008 the ozone standard was strengthened. The Air Quality Index (AQI) for Georgia was adjusted on May 1, 2008 to reflect the new standard. As a result, experts expect more smog alert days in the coming years.

What can schools do if indoor space is limited?

- **Schedule recess and PE before 2:00 pm during the months of May through September.** Georgia experiences more smog alert days due to ozone than due to fine particle pollution (PM). As ozone levels peak during 2:00 and 7:00 p.m., scheduling outdoor activities in the morning during smog season will result in fewer days when you need to move indoors or adjust the regular schedule.
- **Schedule athletic practices that occur in May, June, July, August or September in the early morning**—before school, rather than after school. Or, schedule conditioning practices before school, such as long runs outdoors, and schedule skills training and strength training, which may be easier to hold indoors, during after-school hours.
- **Reduce the duration and intensity of outdoor workouts when air quality is poor.** Focus on skill development rather than endurance training. Shorten conditioning exercises if unable to move them indoors.
- **Get kids moving in limited classroom spaces with yoga or other forms of movement.** A growing numbers of schools are integrating yoga with classroom instruction to enhance learning and increase flexibility, strength and concentration. An Atlanta-based organization facilitates teacher training in a nationally-recognized approach.

Should athletic competitions be cancelled when air quality is poor?

- If outdoor events cannot be moved indoors and ozone, fine particle pollution or both are in the orange, red or purple range, **consider rescheduling the event**. Just as athletic events may be cancelled due to electrical storms and extreme heat and humidity for the health and safety of the students, poor air quality may sometimes warrant cancelling and rescheduling outdoor athletic events.
- If the decision is made to go forward with an athletic competition in smog alert conditions, share the ***Guidance for Georgia Schools: Outdoor Air Quality & Physical Activity*** document with parents and do not penalize athletes who choose not to participate.

What if the decision is made to proceed with outdoor practice or games when pollution concentrations are high?

- Carefully monitor all athletes throughout the event and remove them from competition if they experience chest tightness or difficulty breathing. Athletic conditioning and competition with a “no pain, no gain” approach is dangerous in an area with high concentrations of air pollution.
- Make sure that children with asthma carefully follow their treatment plans and have ready access to quick-relief medications.
- Consider offering frequent breaks and rotating and resting players more often.

Additional Resources

Comprehensive health advisory document on air pollution and outdoor activity:

<http://www.georgiaconservancy.org/mothersandothers/downloads/SmogHealthGuidelines042808.pdf>

Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) air quality index:

http://www.air.dnr.state.ga.us/tmp/today/amp_AQI.html

Mothers & Others for Clean Air: Help us work toward a Georgia in which smog alerts are a thing of the past: www.mothersandothersforcleanair.org

Clean Air Campaign: Find out how to eliminate carpool idling at schools for better air quality: www.cleanaircampaign.com