

August 2005

Playing outdoors during Smog and Heat Alerts

Physical activity provides many health benefits, including promoting healthy weight and overall mental and physical well being. Being active during a Summer Smog or Heat Alert is a concern for everyone. Every effort must be made to minimize exposure to air pollution and extreme heat, especially for children.

Children spend more time outside and are more active than adults. Children breathe in more air and they breathe faster than adults, particularly during strenuous activity and play. Children also tend to breathe through their mouths, allowing large amounts of air into their lungs. Their exposure to air pollution is therefore higher, especially if they play near high traffic areas. Air pollution may make asthma conditions worse, cause throat irritation and breathing difficulties, or potentially cause long-term lung damage. The combined effects of heat and smog are of particular concern.

During a Heat Alert and/or Smog Alert, Toronto Public Health recommends the following precautions to be taken to protect children from exposure to air pollutants and extreme heat:

- Dress children in loose-fitting light-colored clothing.
- Avoid being in the full sun when possible. Stay in the shade and plan your outdoor program activities for early in the morning when it is cooler.
- Provide plenty of drinking water for both children and staff.
- Ensure children wear a hat and use sunscreen (at least SPF 15).
- During a Smog Alert, reduce outdoor activity levels by choosing less vigorous activities or reducing their duration. Provide a wide variety of quiet activities, including waterplay, in shaded areas.
- Monitor children's comfort regularly. If children experience any symptoms, such as coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and/or difficulty breathing, reduce outdoor activity level or move children inside, preferably to an air conditioned environment. Pay attention to children who have pre-existing health conditions such as asthma.
- Provide children with plenty of rest breaks.
- Plan activities away from high traffic areas, especially during the peaks of morning and afternoon rush hours.

Child care providers should check for heat and smog conditions and plan accordingly.

For more information about smog and heat, and resources for indoor physical activity for children, contact Toronto Health Connection at 416-338-7600 or visit www.toronto.ca/health.