

Recess Guidance: Frequently Asked Questions

Are school districts required (under a law) to use the air quality guidance?

- » No. The air quality guidance was developed as a set of guidelines. It is not a law, mandate or policy. It was designed to help schools use air quality information when deciding whether to restrict outdoor physical activities. School districts have varying policies with regard to using the guidance.

What is PM2.5?

- » Particulate matter (PM) refers to very small dust and soot particles. PM2.5 is the term used for particulate matter that is 2.5 micrometers or smaller in size and is expressed in $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ concentrations. This is so small that several thousand of them could fit on the period at the end of this sentence. Sources of PM2.5 include fuel combustion from automobiles, power plants, wood burning, industrial processes, and diesel powered vehicles. The highest levels of PM2.5 usually occur during the winter months.

Where can I check the daily air quality?

- » Air quality conditions are monitored at various sites throughout the state. To check the current PM2.5 levels, visit www.airquality.utah.gov and click on “current conditions.”

What do I do if I have a “sensitive” student?

- » Parents, with the advice of their health care provider, should inform their school if they believe their child is part of a “sensitive” group who should have limited outdoor physical activity when the air quality is poor. Visit www.health.utah.gov/asthma for a sample letter for parents.

How can a student with asthma (or other respiratory disease) be allowed to stay indoors during recess on poor air quality days?

- » It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to contact the school nurse and school administration to communicate their student’s health needs. Some schools may require the parent/guardian to complete a health plan so school officials know when to keep the child indoors.

What school districts or schools have air quality policies?

- » Not all school districts are affected by air quality. Generally, only those with access to results of air monitoring stations in their areas are able to apply the guidance. These areas include Cache, Davis, Salt Lake, Utah and Weber counties.

Recess Guidance: Frequently Asked Questions

Can I use the yellow, red action days to determine when students should be kept indoors?

- » Schools are encouraged to use the Recess Guidance and an individual's sensitivity rather than the color air days to determine when students should be kept indoors. The guidance was developed from data collected, by the Utah Departments of Health and Environmental Quality over three years, on the impact of air quality on students' health. YELLOW and RED air days are a call for public action to reduce pollution.

Is the air inside schools really better than the air outside?

- » Yes. Three studies that address indoor versus outdoor air quality have been completed at two Utah elementary schools.
- » The first and second studies were done at Hawthorne Elementary in Salt Lake City, Utah from December 2004 – February 2005 and then again from December 2005 – February 2006. Results showed indoor air quality is significantly better than outdoor air quality.
- » The third study was done at Greenville Elementary in North Logan, Utah from September 2006 – April 2007. Results showed a 70% drop in PM2.5 levels inside the school versus outside on high pollution days. Additional studies at other Cache County schools confirm these results.

What can be done to improve the air quality near schools?

- » Reducing driving and bus idling on worsening air quality days may help. For information on bus idling reduction programs visit <http://epa.gov/cleanschoolbus/index> or visit www.cleanair.utah.gov for tips on how to improve the air quality in your community.

Is the air quality guidance only for schools?

- » Yes. The guidance was developed for schools and local health departments to help in decision-making about outdoor recess. However, the guidance is based on national and Utah-specific research and can be useful for anyone with asthma or other respiratory diseases.

For more information visit the Utah Department of Health Asthma Program at www.health.utah.gov/asthma.