

MAY 2021

Get Some Fresh Air during Clean Air Month!



Clean air is one of the most important requirements for keeping our lungs and our bodies healthy. Polluted air can harm anyone, although certain individuals are at more risk than others based on their age and pre-existing medical conditions. A few examples of groups at increased risk from polluted air are children, adults over 65 years old, people with asthma or other lung diseases, and people with high blood pressure or other heart diseases.¹ It should be noted, however, that polluted air can also affect healthy individuals that exercise in poor air conditions or that must spend prolonged amounts of time in these conditions.¹ The effects of air pollution on human health vary greatly based on the duration and intensity of the exposure. Symptoms range from reduced lung function and aggravated asthma to heart disease and lung disease.² Air pollutants can often be classified as indoor or outdoor pollutants.

Indoor air pollutants can pose a threat to human health from inside our homes and offices. Many people spend a majority of their time inside buildings, which allows for greater exposure to indoor air pollutants. A few common examples of these pollutants are asbestos, bacteria, carbon monoxide, mold, and radon.³ There are many options for minimizing the presence of these pollutants in your home. One of the best strategies is to ensure proper ventilation and air flow. There are also

specific strategies for some of these pollutants. For example, radon can be detected with a do-it-yourself test and carbon monoxide detectors can be placed in your home.^{4,5} Mold can be prevented by removing excess moisture from your home.⁶ Asbestos can be sealed or removed, pending an evaluation from a trained professional.⁷ If you suspect an [indoor air pollutant](#) could be affecting the air quality in your home, [investigate it](#) and correct it!

Being outside may give you the feeling of “fresh air,” but you could be exposed to outdoor pollutants. The concentrations of these pollutants can vary significantly with the weather and the location of nearby pollution sources. A few common sources are automobiles, utility plants, fires, and any activities that combust fossil fuels.⁸ The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has classified the 5 most important outdoor air pollutants for human health: ground-level ozone, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide.⁹ The EPA has designed the Air Quality Index to make it easier to monitor the past and future levels of these pollutants.¹⁰ An air quality daily forecast is available on the [AirNow site](#), through state and local agencies, and through local weather forecasts. These forecasts will allow you to plan when you should limit your exposure to outdoor air pollutants.

May of each year has been classified as Clean Air Month to increase awareness of air pollution and its negative health effects. This was started by the American Lung Association in 1972 as a week-long occurrence, but was expanded to an entire month in 1994.¹¹ To further the mission of Clean Air Month, we would like to encourage everyone to prioritize clean air. You can begin by resolving any potential air quality issues in your home and by checking air quality forecasts before spending prolonged time outdoors (especially in the summer). If you would like to do more, [here are 10 tips from the American Lung Association](#). Make sure you are getting fresh air!

EVENT



2021 Bike to Work Day

The Washington, D.C. area is celebrating 20 years of Bike to Work Day on May 21, 2021. There will be over 100 pit stops in the area to choose as your destination on your way to work. Register today for your free t-shirt!

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TAKE ACTION



2020 NIH Green Labs Program Recap

We announce the certified labs from the 2020 NIH Green Labs Program. We also discuss the growth of the program since its inception in 2018 and the ICs that have shown the strongest performances to date.

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NEMS TRAINING

Did you know? The Clean Air Act, one of the major inspirations behind Clean Air Month, recently turned 51 years old. Large amendments were made to the Act in 1990, but this legislature still forms a major part of the environmental regulations for air emissions to this day. To learn more about air emissions at the NIH, please visit the [NEMS Training webpage](#) to view a short (20 minute) NIH environmental awareness training video.