

Chicago's air quality is worst in the world after Canadian wildfire smoke blankets the region

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Thick smoke from Canadian wildfires coated Chicago and the

surrounding areas with haze as weather officials issued an air quality alert for parts of the Great Lakes, Lower Mississippi and Ohio valleys Tuesday morning.

According to the monitoring site IQAir, Chicago had the worst air quality out of 95 cities worldwide Tuesday.

As of 11 a.m., the [air quality index](#) had risen to a level considered "very unhealthy," according to AirNow, a website that combines data from county, state and federal air quality agencies nationwide. This means everyone is at risk of experiencing [health effects](#).

Smelling smoke is an immediate sign to stay indoors, said Zac Adelman, executive director of the Lake Michigan Air Directors Consortium.

"It's very common to see smoke in the atmosphere above us," Adelman said. "It's not common to have high concentrations of smoke coming down to the surface like we're experiencing it now."

Lake breezes will bring more smoke Tuesday afternoon, creating hazy conditions for the rest of the day, said Zachary Yack, meteorologist with the National Weather Service. The smoke is expected to linger until Wednesday morning, but visibility may improve by late Tuesday, he said.

"If you're out driving, take it easy out there," Yack said. "There's pretty low visibilities here and there."

Faye Crouteau of Uptown said the air smelled like burning tires when she was walking by the lake Tuesday morning. Afterward, she was sitting outside wearing a mask because she couldn't be inside her condo while it was being inspected.

She said her wife struggles with asthma and long COVID-19. When her wife woke up this morning, the first thing she said was, "I'm having a really hard time today."

Crouteau said she was aware of how bad air quality was in New York City in early June but wasn't particularly concerned about Chicago.

"We're usually saved by the lake," Crouteau said. "But that's obviously not the case today."

Mayor Brandon Johnson's office issued a statement saying the city of Chicago is carefully monitoring the situation.

"This summer, cities across North America have seen unhealthy levels of air quality as a result of wildfire smoke, impacting over 20 million people from New York City, Washington D.C., Montreal, and today here in Chicago," the statement said. "As we work to respond to the immediate health concerns in our communities, this concerning episode demonstrates and underscores the harmful impact that the climate crisis is having on our residents, as well as people all over the world."

Chicago Public Schools issued a statement saying it will use inclement weather plans for its summer programs and hold activities indoors Tuesday to reduce the risk to students and staff.

Health officials said Chicagoans should take these precautions:

- Avoid strenuous outdoor activities.
- Keep outdoor activities short.
- Consider moving physical activities indoors or rescheduling them.
- Consider wearing masks
- Run air purifiers and close windows

Anyone who needs immediate medical attention should dial 911.

While other regions are dealing with excessive heat, Chicago temperatures are expected to hit the low 70s. While the current air conditions are unhealthy for everyone, the risks are increased for children and adults with respiratory and pulmonary conditions, officials said.

The Chicago Cubs have a scheduled home game at 7:05 p.m. Tuesday against the Philadelphia Phillies. Only the commissioners office and players union can decide to postpone a game because of air quality issues, as they did last month in New York and Philadelphia.

Severe thunderstorms and excessive rainfall are possible through Saturday, weather officials said.

Meanwhile, a beach hazard remains in effect for northern and central Cook County from 10 a.m. Tuesday into the evening hours as waves from 3 to 5 feet are expected. Conditions will be life-threatening, especially for inexperienced swimmers.

There are high swim risks at the Lake Michigan shore as choppy waves on the southern beaches and Indiana beaches are expected, officials said. These conditions are expected to continue through Monday.

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