



Earth Gauge™ Atlanta – Public Health

Environmental Information for Broadcast Meteorologists

This fact sheet is part of a series on key weather-environment topics for the Atlanta regional area. The Earth Gauge™ Healthy Communities project is designed to provide basic background information on environmental impacts in major U.S. urban areas, as well as simple messages meteorologists can deliver to their viewers.

Not only does the weather impact the environment, it can also impact your health. While everyone is susceptible to weather-related health problems, poor air quality and water quality, extreme heat, and other weather conditions can be especially dangerous for sensitive groups – the elderly, children, and individuals with chronic health conditions.

How Does Weather Affect My Health?



Poor air quality is a serious problem for the more than 300,000 individuals living with chronic heart and lung conditions in Atlanta. Ground-level ozone pollution, created by a reaction between air pollutants and sunlight, can aggravate asthma and other lung conditions, and particle pollution can cause problems for asthmatics and individuals with cardiovascular disease.



Combined sewers make up 15 percent of Atlanta's waste water treatment system and are designed to carry both sewage and rain water to treatment plants. Heavy rain events and flooding can overload the system, discharging a combination of rain water and sewage our local streams and rivers. Bacteria and viruses contained in the overflow can cause health problems for individuals coming in contact with the water, and can result in closures of recreation, fishing, and swimming areas.



Extreme heat events are expected to increase in future years, and it is estimated that heat-related deaths in Atlanta could more-than-double by the end of the century. Extreme heat events can result in illnesses such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke, and are often coupled with poor air quality and stagnant air that exacerbate health problems.



Nice weather offers an excellent opportunity for individuals to get outside, get the recommended 30 minutes of exercise each day, and reconnect with natural areas in the Atlanta region.

Learn More about Weather and Public Health

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) offer extensive resources on the health effects of extreme weather events and natural disasters, including extreme heat, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and others.

www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters

Designing and Building Healthy Places, a CDC program, address health issues related to land use – accessibility, children and elders' health, physical activity, air quality and respiratory health, water quality, and others. www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces

Flip this page over to find simple messages and tips about weather and public health you can use during your on-air weather report.



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Making the Connection: What You Can Say On-Air

Here are some simple facts and tips you can provide to your viewers to help make the connection between weather and public health. Help your viewers understand how they can protect their health.

Asthma Avoidance

While the average adult breathes in about 3,000 gallons of air each day, children breathe in even more air per pound of body weight, making them more susceptible to health problems from air pollution. High levels of air pollution can trigger asthma attacks and other health problems for individuals with chronic lung conditions.

Viewer Tip: Approximately 212,000 children and 480,000 adults in Georgia have asthma. If you or your child suffers from asthma, there are easy steps you can take to reduce exposure to air pollution. Use the air quality forecast provided by your local meteorologist or visit www.airnow.gov to find out when pollution levels are likely to be high, and try to stay indoors during those times. If you do go outside, avoid strenuous exercise (such as running) to reduce your risk.



Combined Sewer Overload

Atlanta has over 1500 miles of sewer pipes, and some of those pipes are designed to handle both sewage and storm water at the same time. During heavy rains, the system can be overloaded, and both sewage and rain water overflows into the nearest stream or river.

Viewer Tip: After an overflow occurs, your local health officials will warn you if local waters are unsafe. Be sure to pay attention to the warnings, or ask your local public health agency if you're not sure about swimming or fishing.

Want to find out about local water health advisories? Learn more about the Chattahoochee River BacteriALERT Program: www.gaconservancy.org/WaterQuality/WQ_Bacterialert.asp

Heat and Age

High temperatures, coupled with high humidity, can create dangerous health conditions. These unhealthy conditions can be especially noticeable in cities, where "hard" surfaces absorb and trap heat, and hot air traps pollutants. Older people can be especially vulnerable to heat-related illnesses because the ability to respond to hot weather becomes less efficient with age.

Viewer Tip: Older individuals - especially those with special health conditions - should try to stay indoors on hot, humid days, particularly when air pollution levels are elevated. If you don't have a fan or air conditioner, try to get to a mall, library, movie theater, or other air-conditioned community building to cool off (many communities offer cooling centers during heat waves). If you have an older relative or friend, check in with them often to make sure they are coping with the heat.



School Haze?

In the mornings, 20 to 25 percent of American commuter traffic is made up of parents driving their children to school! As traffic increases, many parents feel even less inclined to have their children walk or bike to school.

Viewer Tip: Encouraging children to walk or bike to school on nice days can cut down on traffic and subsequent air pollution from cars that can trigger childhood respiratory problems, including asthma. You can help your kids find a safe route to school, or even walk with them in the mornings. If you drive your children to school, consider setting up a carpool with other parents in the neighborhood to cut down on the number of drivers in the morning.