

Thursday, June 12, 2008

For Immediate Release

## **Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) expands to York Region**

*National health based index will help residents protect their health from harmful air pollution*

**NEWMARKET** – The Regional Municipality of York Public Health branch welcomes the new Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) pilot to York Region. This new health index, available at [www.airhealth.ca](http://www.airhealth.ca), will help residents better understand how to protect their health from the harmful effects of local air pollution.

The AQHI pilot has been expanded into York Region and other areas of the GTA following a pilot in the City of Toronto in 2007. The index, developed by Environment Canada and Health Canada, is now being expanded and promoted through the efforts of the Clean Air Partnership, provincial and federal governments and GTA public health units. The AQHI index provides hourly, daily and future forecasts of local air pollution.

“Poor air quality affects everyone’s health,” said Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region’s Medical Officer of Health and Director of Public Health Programs. “This system has been designed so users can easily understand at what point on the scale their health is most negatively impacted by air pollution.”

The AQHI measures air quality in relation to people’s health on a scale from one to 10+. The higher the number, the greater the health risk and the greater need for people to take precautions when spending time outdoors. The health messages associated with the various levels of air pollution are different for those who are at higher risk to air pollution compared to the general population. High risk groups include children, the elderly, people with pre-existing heart and breathing problems and people participating in outdoor sports or strenuous work.

Environment Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Environment will use an existing network of provincial air quality monitoring stations in the GTA to produce twice daily AQHI forecasts for current and next day readings. In York Region, there is one fixed air monitoring station located in the Town of Newmarket. Over the next several months, the Ministry of the Environment is considering special studies using a mobile air monitoring unit in southern York Region.

The AQHI pilot does not replace the existing Air Quality Index (AQI) that triggers smog advisories. Instead, the new system measures individual health risk and enables people to better protect themselves and people in their care from the harmful effects of air pollution.

For more information on the AQHI, please contact York Region *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653 or visit [www.airhealth.ca](http://www.airhealth.ca)

For more information on The Regional Municipality of York, please visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)

- 30 -

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## The Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) expands to York Region

**NEWMARKET** – The AQHI is a national health based index that helps residents better understand how to protect their health from local air pollution. It measures air quality in relation to people's health on a scale from one to 10+. The higher the number, the greater the health risk and the greater need for people to take precautions when spending time outdoors.

The health messages associated with the various levels of air pollution are different for those who are especially sensitive or at higher risk to air pollution compared to the general population. High risk groups include children, the elderly, people with pre-existing heart and breathing problems and people participating in outdoor sports or strenuous work.

The AQHI values are grouped into the following health risk categories:

Health Risk	Air Quality Health Index	Health Messages	
		At-risk population	General population
<b>Low</b>	<b>1-3</b>	<b>Enjoy</b> your usual outdoor activities	<b>Ideal</b> air quality for outdoor activities
<b>Moderate</b>	<b>4-6</b>	<b>Consider reducing</b> or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you are experiencing symptoms.	<b>No need to modify</b> your usual outdoor activities unless you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.
<b>High</b>	<b>7-10</b>	<b>Reduce</b> or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also take it easy.	<b>Consider reducing</b> or rescheduling strenuous activities outdoors if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.
<b>Very High</b>	<b>Above 10</b>	<b>Avoid</b> strenuous activities outdoors. Children and the elderly should also avoid outdoor physical exertion.	<b>Reduce</b> or reschedule strenuous activities outdoors, especially if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation.

The AQHI is available at [www.airhealth.ca](http://www.airhealth.ca) The index provides hourly, daily and future forecasts of local air pollution. Residents are encouraged to check it every day.

Individuals and businesses can reduce air pollution by conserving energy, limiting the use of cars, pesticides, oil-based paints, solvents and gas powered engines. To learn more about reducing your energy use, order a free *20/20 Way to Clean Air Planner Guide* at 1-866-583-2020 or [www.cleanairpartnership.org/2020](http://www.cleanairpartnership.org/2020)

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- 30 -

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