RACE PROGRAM

Air Quality Policy

July 2025

Introduction

This Policy is intended to provide information and guidance to Nakkertok Race Program coaches and parents on how the Nakkertok Race Program will plan for and respond to poor air quality during planned training activities and events.

Poor air quality can impact the health and performance of outdoor sport participants, including athletes, coaches and sport officials. The Nakkertok Racing Program recognizes the potential short- and long-term health effects of engaging in physical activity outdoors when the air quality is poor. The Nakkertok Racing Program is fully committed to reducing the risk posed to outdoor sport participants from poor air quality to help contribute to safer outdoor activities and events. (1)

This Policy aims to increase the safety of all outdoor sport participants with respect to air quality. The information in this Policy applies to all individuals and at all times during Nakkertok Racing Program sanctioned events and activities. This includes any events in Canada and abroad. (1)

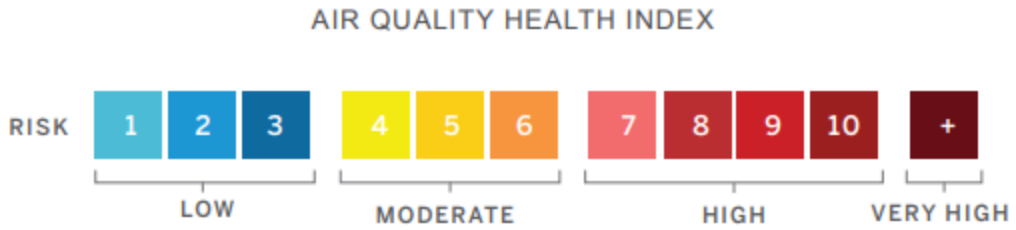
Summary

- Attendance at training is never mandatory for athletes or volunteer coaches. Participants must make their own decision about attending, depending on their own assessment of risk and comfort level in the predicted conditions.
- Coaches will check the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) forecast in advance of scheduled training.
- If poor air quality is forecast (AQHI of 4 or higher), coaches will use the decision making tool below to determine if changes to the training session are required to mitigate risks.
- Changes to training sessions may include cancelling, changing the timing, or intensity of the planned activity, or communicating additional information to parents and/or athletes.
- Decisions will be made by the lead coaches of the relevant program, in consultation with any other affected program lead coaches, at least 90 minutes prior to scheduled practice.
- Changes to planned training (cancellation, change to timing, duration, type) will be communicated by coaches to the community via Whatsapp. Parents must refrain from contacting coaches to confirm plans.

- Athletes with pre-existing medical conditions, such as asthma, should make decisions about whether to participate in training based on their personal circumstances.

Air Quality Health Index

The Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) was created to help individuals understand and make decisions about the safety of the air around them. Sport participants can use the AQHI to help monitor their local air quality and make informed decisions about the safety of outdoor sport participation. The AQHI presents the relative health risk associated with the combined health effects of air pollutants. (2)

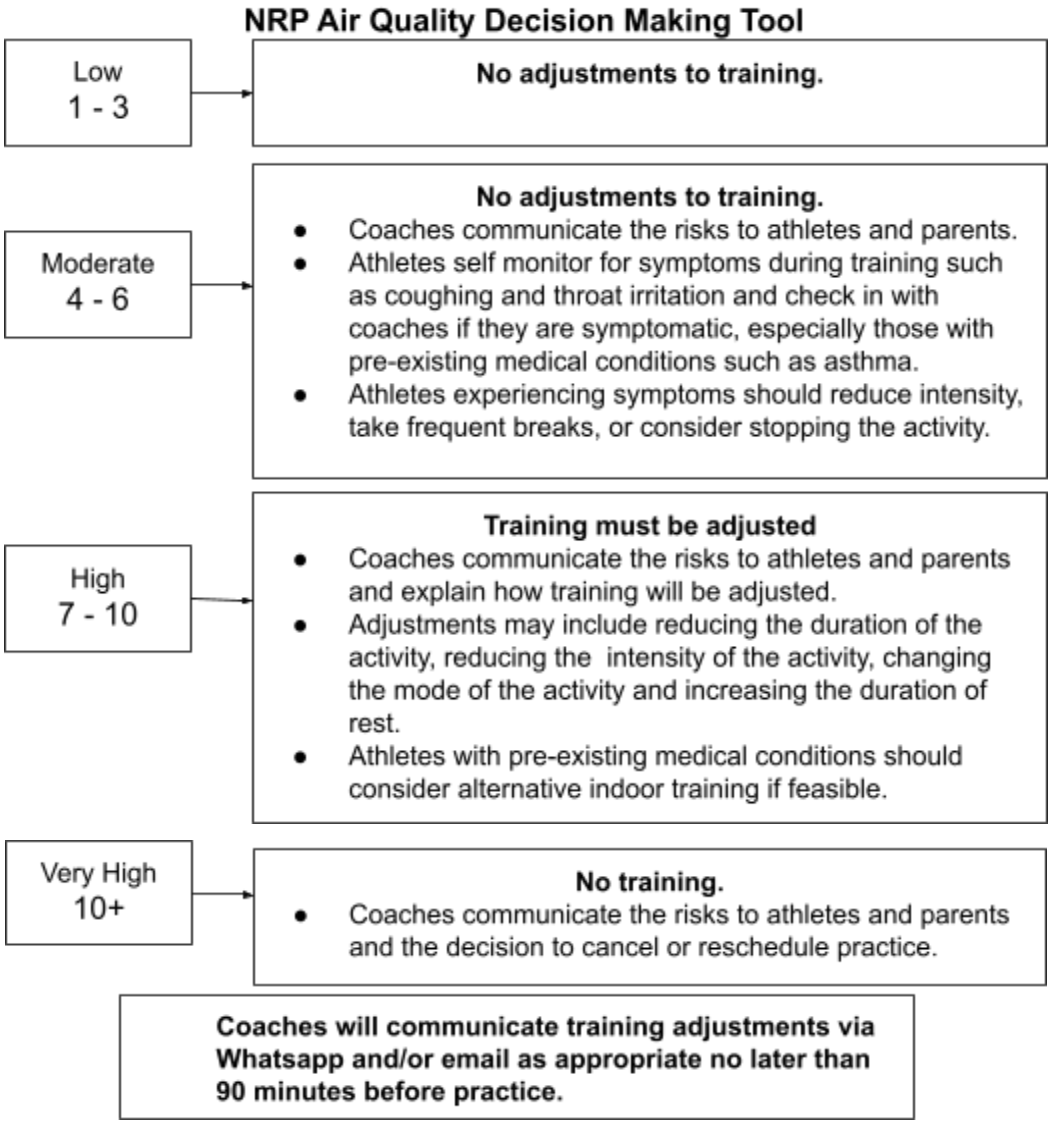


You can find your local AQHI by visiting AirHealth.ca or by downloading the WeatherCAN app. The WeatherCAN app can also be used to receive notifications when the AQHI exceeds a pre-set level (for example, AQHI 4). Coaches can also monitor media platforms (including television, radio, and social media) for regional and local air quality alerts. (1)

For local training, coaches will use the forecasted and observed AQHI readings for Ottawa to inform decisions about training in the National Capital Region, as observed values are not available for Gatineau.

Decision Making Tool

Coaches will use this tool with forecasted and observed AQHI values for Ottawa to decide if a training session needs to be altered in some way.



Alternative Options to be Considered

If necessary, based on forecasted air quality, coaches will consider alternative options, which may include (alone or in combination):

- canceling training/event;
- changing start time of training (delaying or starting earlier if feasible);
- changing mode, type (intensity and/or amount of recovery,) or duration of training;
- advising of potential risks and reminding coaches and athletes/parents that attendance by volunteer coaches and athletes is not mandatory.

Monitoring Symptoms

It is important that athletes monitor themselves for symptoms such as coughing or throat irritation, especially when the AQHI indicates a moderate or greater risk. Athletes with pre-existing medical conditions, such as asthma should pay particularly close attention to any symptoms related to their condition, as they may be at an increased risk. (2) Athletes that are experiencing symptoms should communicate with coaches, and may need to alter their training plans for the session.

1 - Air Quality and Outdoor Sport Safety: A Policy Guide for Canadian Sport Organizations - Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC)
https://sirc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Air-Quality-Policy-Guide-FINAL-EN.pdf

2 - Understanding Air Quality: A Guiding Document for Sport Organizations - (SIRC)
https://sirc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Air-Quality-Guiding-Document-FINAL-EN.pdf

3 - Understanding Air Quality Health Index Messages: Government of Ontario
https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/understanding-messages.html