

Panhandle

Public Health District

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June 10, 2026

For Immediate Release

Wildfires threaten air quality in the Northern Panhandle

Due to the unfortunate recent wildfires, the Northwestern Panhandle may be experiencing air quality issues ranging from unhealthy to very unhealthy. The air quality ratings are based on the Air Quality Index (AQI), which measures the concentration of pollutants such as particulate matter in the air. Local air sensors can be found at lovemyair.com/Nebraska/home/map or download the Love My Air Network app on your phone to get push notifications when there is poor air quality in your community.

While we don't currently have a local sensor in the Northwestern part of the Panhandle, residents are encouraged to be aware of the symptoms of poor air quality they may be experiencing:

- Headaches
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Coughing
- Tightness of the chest
- Fatigue
- Aggravation of existing health conditions

Community members experiencing negative effects from smoke are encouraged to limit time outdoors and use air filtration whenever possible. The tips in this video will guide you to create a clean room in your home: <https://youtu.be/V8DqzogXcVg>.

"Air quality concerns during a fire event can add to an already hazardous situation. We want to empower residents to protect themselves and their loved ones in every way they can." Megan Barhafer, Community Health Planner.

While poor air quality can make anyone sick, certain people are at greater risk for serious complications:

- Children under 18 years of age



- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Pregnant women
- People with a history of smoking
- People with current respiratory illnesses, chronic lung disease (like asthma and COPD), diabetes (type 1 and 2), heart disease, and certain other long-term health conditions
- People who are unhoused or unsheltered due to increased exposure outdoors

Steps the Public Can Take to Protect Themselves and Others

- **Stay up to date on air quality.** Local air sensors can be found at lovemyair.com/Nebraska/home/map or download the LoveMyAir network app to get push notifications when there is poor air quality in your community
- **Know your wildfire risk.** Knowing your wildfire risk can help you to plan for a potentially poor air quality day
- **Prevent indoor pollution.** Avoid or limit the following:
 - Air fresheners, diffusing oils, candles
 - Smoking or vaping indoors
 - Broiling or frying foods
 - Using gas or propane stoves, furnaces or heaters
- **Stay with family or friends,** if your indoor air quality cannot be maintained at a safe level
- **Work with your doctor** if you are sensitive to poor air quality so you can develop a safety plan.
- **Evacuate if necessary.** Follow instructions from our local emergency management systems and evacuate if necessary.

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community.