The Air Quality Flag Program and Older Adults

Why should older adults care about air pollution?

As people get older, their bodies are less able to compensate for the effects of environmental hazards. Air pollution, like ozone, particle pollution (PM), and especially fine particle pollution ($PM_{2.5}$), is most likely to affect the health of older adults.

Fine particle pollution has been linked to premature death, cardiac arrhythmias and heart attacks, asthma attacks, and the development of chronic bronchitis. Ozone, even at low levels, can aggravate respiratory diseases. This leads to increased use of medication, more visits to health care providers, admissions to emergency rooms and hospitals, and even death.

What can you do to reduce your exposure to air pollution?

- Check the Air Quality Index (AQI) at www.airnow.gov. The AQI reports how clean the air is and whether it can affect your health.
- Use the air quality activity guidelines* to find out what outdoor activities are best for you based on the current and forecasted air quality. When the AQI is unhealthy, for example, you may want to take more rest breaks, or walk instead of jog.
- Ask a local organization, such as your senior center, library, fire station or museum, to start an Air Quality Flag Program.

What is the Air Quality Flag Program?

Air Quality Flag Program participants raise a flag that corresponds to the AQI forecast, which alerts the community to the potential for unhealthy air. The color of the flag matches EPA's Air Quality Index (AQI): green, yellow, orange, red, and purple.

On unhealthy days, you can adjust physical activities to help reduce exposure to air pollution while still keeping active. Remember, air quality changes like the weather, so check your AQI before making plans. Go to www.airnow.gov/flag for more information. The air quality flags are a daily reminder to be aware of your air!

* https://www.airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=flag_program.outdoorguid