



**E**ver notice that you breathe a little heavier than normal during outdoor, summer activities? If so, don't put all the blame on the heat.

"Smog affects everybody," says Bryant Gargiulo, clinical education coordinator of Respiratory Care Services at Piedmont Hospital. "Some people are affected more than others."

During the summer smog season, levels of ground ozone become dangerously high, especially for people suffering from respiratory disorders such as asthma. Ozone, a major component of smog, is an odorless, colorless gas that is formed when pollutants emitted by cars, power and chemical plants, and other sources react chemically in the presence of sunlight.


"When smog alerts are high, people with underlying respiratory problems should stay indoors as much as they can," Gargiulo says. "Children under 14 and adults over 65 are also likely to be negatively affected by smog."

The chemical composition of smog can cause a person's airways to react by becoming irritated, swelling and sometimes narrowing. Too much exposure over time may even affect the immune system, Gargiulo adds.

"Common health problems associated with smog are the chronic irritation of the eyes and nose, coughing and difficulty breathing," Gargiulo says. "When you are working in the yard, for example, you

may tire faster because your lungs are working harder to breathe."

For asthmatics, the problems are more severe. A fair number of asthma-related deaths occur every year, usually at the height of pollution season, he says.

If you are concerned about the effects that smog is having on your health, consult your physician. 

### What is the pollution solution?

Helping to improve air quality is something everyone can do. Here are some tips to reduce smog:

- Carpool, use MARTA or telecommute from home, if possible.
- Don't pump gas during the middle of the day or overfill your gas tank.
- Use gas-powered equipment such as lawnmowers during cooler, evening hours.
- Avoid drive-throughs to reduce vehicle idling.
- Drive at a moderate speed, avoiding quick starts and stops.
- Get regular tune-ups for your vehicle, inflate tires properly, keep wheels aligned and replace dirty air filters.