



The Importance of Indoor Air Quality in Reducing Respiratory Illness Risk

Tina Koral, MPH, Health Promotions Manager, Kane County Health Department
September 15, 2023

This summer, more than 800 active fires burning across Canada sent smoke across the Midwest and Northeast, and we could see and feel the effects here in Kane County. While the smoke contributed to some beautiful sunsets, the impact on our health was not so positive, as local air quality alerts ranged from "moderate" to "unhealthy."

Much of the focus was on outdoor air quality, but an equally important and sometimes overlooked aspect of good health is indoor air quality. The air we breathe in the places we live, work, and learn has a profound impact on our health, comfort, and overall quality of life. Respiratory illnesses (infections that affect our airways) are more common in the colder months, and improving indoor air quality could reduce your risk of the "triple threat" of [COVID-19](#), [Influenza](#) (flu), and [Respiratory Syncytial Virus](#) (RSV).

What is Indoor Air Quality?

Indoor air quality refers to the condition of the air inside buildings and structures, and is influenced by pollutants, temperature, humidity, and ventilation. Pollutants include allergens, particulate matter, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and radon. Respiratory viruses are considered biological pollutants, and also include bacteria and mold spores. Considering that [the average American spends about 90% of their time indoors](#), and that most indoor spaces do not have ventilated, filtered air, we are often exposed to high levels of pollutants and infectious diseases.

Why is Indoor Air Quality Important?

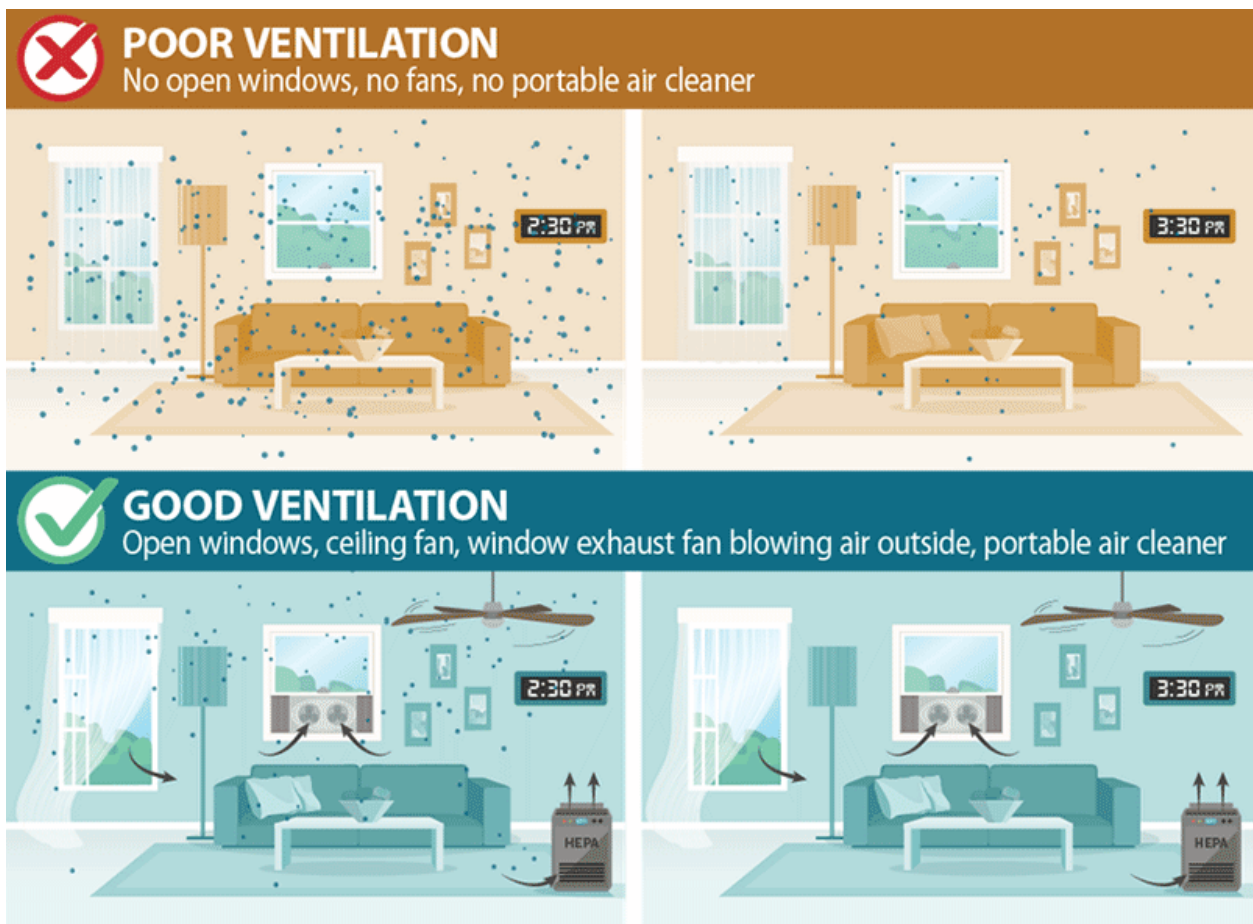
The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us of the importance of fresh, outdoor air. COVID-19, Flu, and RSV are all viruses that are carried by airborne droplets. For the most part, transmission of those droplets from one person to another happens indoors. These and other respiratory viruses cause many people to be sick each year, resulting in missed school days, lost productivity in the workplace, and the complications of serious illness.

Improve Indoor Air Quality to Reduce Risk

While the single best way to protect yourself against respiratory illnesses is to [get vaccinated](#), you can take steps to protect yourself and your family by improving the air quality inside your home.

1. Bring fresh air in. If it is safe to do so, open doors and windows to increase air flow. Fans can move virus particles from inside to the outside. Keep young children safe around open doors, windows, and fans.
2. Filter the air in your home. Replace furnace filters according to your furnace specifications, and perhaps more frequently in the colder months when respiratory illnesses are more common. Consider a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter or cleaner.
3. Increase circulation. Turn your HVAC fan feature from “auto” to “on” when you have guests (with or without the heat or air conditioning being used).

[Learn how the Kane County Health Department works to keep the air you breathe safe.](#)



[Image Source](#)

More resources:

[Healthy Habits to Protect Against Flu](#)

[Protect Indoor Air Quality in Your Home](#)

[Creating Healthy Indoor Air Quality in Schools](#)

[Take Action on Radon](#)

[Immunization: The Basics](#)

[Real-Time Air Quality Index Report for Kane County](#)

[American Lung Association State of the Air: Kane County](#)