



EnviroTrack

Tracking the Environment and Public Health in Your Community

Spring 2025

ASTHMA AWARENESS MONTH

May is asthma awareness month! Currently, there are over 22 million adults and over 4.5 million children living with asthma, according to the [most recent CDC data available](#). A great way to support a loved one or yourself if you have asthma is by making your home a more asthma-friendly environment.

Here are some ways to reduce triggers in home:

- **Address mold.** Molds are tiny fungi that can be found in almost any place where moisture is present. Inhaling mold spores can trigger asthma attacks in sensitive people. Here are some things you can do if you notice mold in your home:
 - Remove sources of moisture, like repairing water leaks. **Mold can't grow without water or moisture.**
 - Mold can be cleaned off hard surfaces with soap and water. Carpet, drywall, and ceiling should be replaced and kept dry.
 - Keep your home dry. Use exhaust fans or open a window when showering, washing dishes, and cooking. Use an air conditioner or dehumidifier to keep your homes' humidity between 30-50%.
- **Avoid secondhand smoke.** Secondhand smoke is created by a smoker and breathed in by another person. Like all smoke, secondhand smoke can trigger asthma attacks. Ask people not to smoke around you or your child. If you smoke and live with a person with asthma, don't smoke in your home or car. Another concern is [thirdhand smoke](#), which is the residue left behind from tobacco smoke. This residue can linger indoors for years on furniture, walls, and clothing and is also harmful to health. To avoid exposure, dispose of contaminated household items, such as carpeting or furniture. Replace drywall and wash curtains. Open windows and use high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters in your house can increase circulation of clean air.
- **Use safer cleaning products.** Keeping your home clean is an important part of an asthma control plan. But for some people cleaning products can be asthma triggers because of the harsh chemicals or strong scents. Natural products like vinegar and baking soda can be effective and safer alternatives. Check out the list of recipes from American Lung Association for [cleaning products](#) to use throughout the home.
- **Use IPM strategies for pest problems.** Cockroaches and other pests can be asthma triggers. Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques if you have a pest problem:
 - Remove food and water sources. Clean up crumbs, don't leave dishes in the sink overnight. Store food in airtight containers and keep trash in a closed container.
 - Seal cracks in walls, cabinets, baseboards, and around plumbing.
 - Vacuum or sweep areas that might attract pests often.



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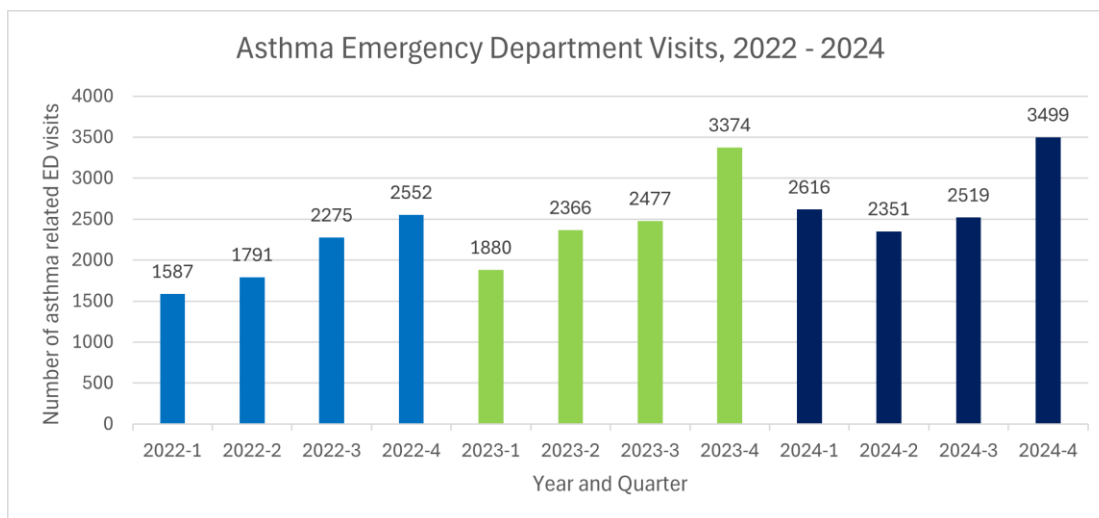
- Pesticides and insecticides can be harmful to people if not used properly. Use sparingly, and if using choose baits and gels over bombs, sprays, or aerosols.

For more information on Integrated Pest Management principles, visit [EPA's page on Integrated Pest Management](#).

- **Dust control.** Dust mites are tiny bugs that live in every home and can trigger asthma in some people. Here are some ways you can minimize the impacts of dust mites:
 - Wash bedding in hot water weekly and dry completely. Use allergen-proof mattresses and pillowcase covers. Avoid down-filled pillows and comforters.
 - Vacuum and dust weekly. Use a vacuum equipped with a HEPA filter and dust with a damp cloth or microfiber cloth. Consider removing carpet and replacing with a hard-surface floor.
 - Choose toys for your child that you can wash.
- **Pets.** Pet dander comes from the shed skin cells of some pets and can cause allergic reactions or asthma attacks. If you have a pet and someone in the home has allergies or asthma, consider not allowing the pet on the furniture or the bedrooms. Other things that may help are using a HEPA filter in the home, using allergen-proof mattress and pillow covers, and vacuuming/dusting when the affected person isn't around. Before bringing a pet into the home, discuss hypoallergenic dog and cat breeds with a veterinarian.

To learn more, Organizations like [American Lung Association](#), [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#), and [Environmental Protection Agency](#) work to educate and raise awareness about asthma.

If you would like to schedule a home assessment and learn more about asthma triggers in your home, contact the [Breathe Easier](#) program at Marion County Public Health Department.



Graph courtesy of Epidemiology Department

Are you interested in Environmental Health and Asthma data? Visit Marion County Public Health Department's Environmental Public Health Tracking [website](#). For national data, visit Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Environmental Public Health Tracking [website](#).

SEASONAL ALLERGIES ARE COMING...

While spring showers may bring May flowers, many Marion County residents know that March and April also mean seasonal allergies are just around the corner. Because of Indiana's cold winters, seasonal allergies typically begin in early March as trees begin to release their pollen.

Those who suffer from seasonal allergies are encouraged to keep an eye on pollen counts in April, May, and September, when seasonal allergies are usually at their peak. Tracking pollen counts is becoming easier as numerous weather and air quality websites report pollen counts and provide allergen forecasts.



To help with pollen allergies, you can reduce your exposure to allergens, take medication, and make your home more allergy-friendly.

Reduce exposure to allergens

- Avoid lawn mowing and other gardening chores that stir up allergens
- Stay indoors on dry, windy days
- Wear a face mask when you go outside
- Shower and change your clothes after being outside
- Don't hang laundry outside
- Keep your windows closed during pollen season

Take medication

- Take antihistamines
- Use a decongestant
- Use a nasal corticosteroid spray
- Use allergy eyedrops

Make your home more allergy-friendly

- Use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration system
- Use washable curtains, blinds, and rugs
- Replace upholstered furniture with furniture made of leather, wood, metal, or plastic
- Avoid wood-burning fireplaces or stoves

Other tips

- Start taking allergy treatments before pollen season begins
- Watch pollen counts and forecasts
- Talk to your health care provider about immune therapy, such as allergy shots or sublingual/oral immunotherapy

GROUNDWATER AWARENESS

Many homes in Marion County get their water from private wells. If your home is on a private well, you are responsible for the quality of your water. The only way to know if it's safe is to have the water tested. If you are a Marion County resident, you can call 317-221-2266 or [fill out the online request form](#) to request a FREE well water test that includes coliform bacteria, anions, heavy metals, and volatile organic compounds.

MCPHD does NOT condemn wells and does not require homeowners to install water treatment systems. Environmental Health Specialists will provide a free water quality report and may offer guidance and recommendations.

Some common contaminants found in well water in Marion County are Arsenic, Nitrate, and coliform bacteria. Arsenic is a naturally occurring metal found in bedrock, but high levels can increase the risk of developing certain kinds of cancers. Nitrate is an anion that can come from natural or anthropogenic (man-made sources) like sewage, fertilizers, or erosion of rocks and soils. High levels of Nitrate can be especially harmful to infants. Coliform bacteria are very common and found in many well water samples. While this type of bacteria is not harmful itself, it can indicate the presence of other microorganisms that are more difficult to test for, and treatment is recommended.



When to test:

- Annually for coliform bacteria and nitrates, every 3-5 years other chemicals
- Any time you notice a change in taste, color, or odor
- If flooding occurs near the well
- If someone in the home has a sudden or unexplained illness
- If small children, elderly adults, or pregnant or nursing women live in the home
- Any time you replace or repair the well, or open the well cap.

It's especially important to protect your groundwater if your home is on private well. Here are some tips to keep your drinking water safe:



- Avoid pouring or storing chemicals near the well
- Do not dispose of hazardous chemicals in a septic system. Remember to have the septic system pumped every 3-5 years.
- Regularly inspect any above ground and underground storage tanks on your property.
- Regularly inspect your well for damage to the casing, well cap, or well seal. Keep accurate records of any maintenance

including disinfection. Keep a copy of your well log, if available. Visit [Indiana Department of Natural Resources website](#) to search the well log database.

More resources:

<https://marionhealth.org/private-well-program/>

<https://wellowner.org/>

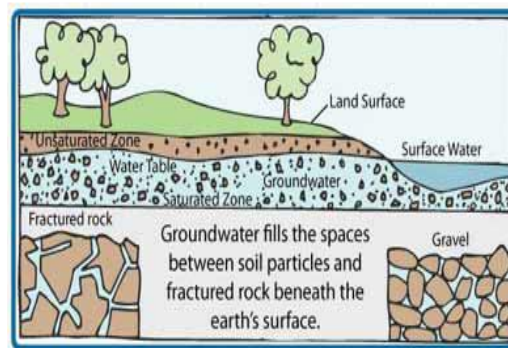
<https://www.epa.gov/privatewells>

GROUNDWATER IS DRINKING WATER. PROTECT IT!

Did you know that Marion County's three water utilities – Citizens, Lawrence Utilities and Speedway Water Works – all use groundwater? Lawrence Utilities is 100% groundwater, Speedway Water Works is approximately 40% groundwater and Citizens is 25% groundwater.

In total, almost one-third (or 10 billion gallons) of the water used yearly as part of the public water supply is below ground and comes to us via groundwater wells.

Zones surrounding groundwater supply wells are referred to as Wellfield or Wellhead Protection Areas. In Marion County, Wellfield Protection Areas cover approximately 33 square miles of land area. Based on 2018 land use data from the City of Indianapolis, about 71% of the wellfields are used for residential purposes, 13% for commercial and industrial purposes, and 15.5% is used for other purposes (such as vacant land, agriculture, places of worship, and parks). Also, there are multiple energy pipelines carrying petroleum products across Marion County. Many of these pipelines cross the wellfields.



Source: California EPA - State Water Resources Control Board



As you drive around Marion County, you will see signs letting you know when you enter one of Marion County's seven wellfields. Both the City of Indianapolis and the Marion County Public Health Department have rules to ensure chemicals from certain business activities do not soak through the ground into the groundwater, where it is then drawn into

one of the 72 drinking water supply wells.



To help businesses located within wellfields comply with these regulations, the Marion County Wellfield Education Committee ([MCWEC](#)) provides education focusing on best management practices (BMPs) to handle chemicals, waste, liquids, or other substances that could contaminate groundwater. MCWEC also partners with an environmental consulting firm to provide free, confidential assessments for businesses located within the county's protected wellfield areas. To find out if a business is located in a Wellfield Protection Area, MCWEC has an easy to use [address locator](#).

It is important to remember that everyone living and working in wellfields shares the responsibility to protect Marion County's underground drinking water supply by properly using and disposing of products that can harm the environment and contaminate groundwater. Marion County residents can dispose of unwanted and unused household hazardous waste as well as electronics on Saturdays during ToxDrop events. throughout the city. For times and locations, go to [Indy.gov Tox Drop website](#).



PREPARING FOR SEVERE WEATHER

While the first day of Spring may be weeks away, it is never too early to start thinking about and planning for the severe weather that will soon be headed towards central Indiana. To help prepare Indiana communities, the National Weather Service (NWS) and Indiana Department of Homeland Security have proclaimed March 9-15 as Severe Weather Preparedness Week!



Throughout the week, Hoosiers will be reminded about seasonal severe weather threats and will learn how to effectively prepare for them. On **Tuesday, March 11**, Marion County businesses, families, and schools will get the opportunity to test their preparedness skill in Indiana's Statewide Tornado Drill. **At about 10:15 a.m. Eastern time, NWS will issue a test tornado warning alert, which will be shared through most notification systems, including the statewide Emergency Alert System (EAS). Wherever you are at that time, practice your tornado safety plan.**

To help prepare for severe storms, tornadoes and floods, NWS and IDHS have these quick tips.

- Go indoors when you hear thunder. When you hear thunder, lightning is within 10 miles and can strike you. Stay indoors until at least 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder.
- Consider how you would be alerted if there were a tornado warning. Sirens are meant to be heard outside and cannot be relied on if you are indoors. Have a NOAA weather radio or weather alert app.
- Have a location designated as your safe spot regardless of what kind of building you are in. A basement or storm shelter is best, but an interior room, stairway or hall without a window or door to the outside is acceptable.
- Remember flying debris causes the most injuries and fatalities during tornadoes. Use a helmet, blanket, or mattress as protection for your head and neck. This protects the most vulnerable parts of your body from flying debris.
- Stay out of the floodwater. Floodwater can contain hazards such as waste and contaminants, downed power lines, vehicles, signs, and trees. Even a few inches of swift-moving water can knock an adult over. Stay out and find another route.
- Do not drive into floodwater. More than half of all flood-related drownings are caused by driving a vehicle into the flooded area. As little as 2 feet of water can cause most cars to float, so play it safe and **Turn around, don't drown!**



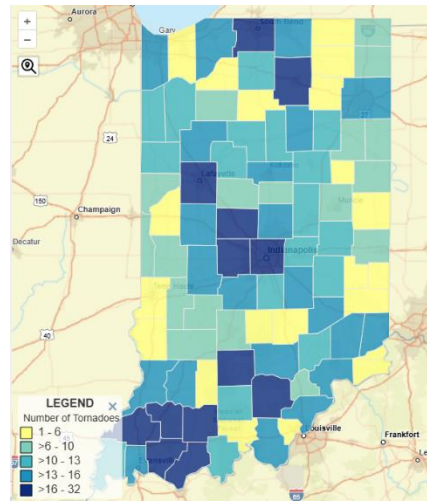
Timing is critical When it comes to being prepared. Before severe storms arrive, take steps to reduce risk:

- Check weather forecasts daily and plan outdoor activities to be near a secure shelter if a storm is possible.
- Put pets indoors ahead of time.
- Park vehicles, if possible, in a covered area to avoid damage from hail or debris.
- Find out what flood insurance coverage would cost to add to your policy for your home. New policies take 30 days to become effective, so you need to add coverage well before any anticipated flooding.

To learn more about historical severe weather activity in Indiana and Marion County, go to CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network Data Explorer <https://ephtracking.cdc.gov/DataExplorer/>

There you will find data about:

- Historical tornado activity as well as tornado related injuries and fatalities
- Current and historical flooding
- Historical precipitation
- Flooding vulnerability and preparedness



DROWNING PREVENTION

May is Drowning Prevention Month! Drowning is the leading cause of death among children aged 1-4 years old and is the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for children 5-14. Some groups are affected more than others: according to [CDC data](#), drowning rates are consistently highest among males, non-Hispanic African Americans, and non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native persons. Children with disabilities and children with an autism spectrum diagnosis are also at higher risk of drowning. One important step you can take to prevent drowning is knowing how to tell if somebody is in danger. Here are some warning signs:

- A person's mouth will typically be bobbing above and below water level. They will likely be unable to cry for help as they are focused on breathing.
- Their head could be tilted back. If eyes are open, they may appear glassy and unfocused. Hair may have fallen over the face or eyes.
- The body is in a vertical (up and down) position.
- Arms and legs are making a "climbing ladder" motion. This may make it difficult for them to wave for help or grab on to a rescuer or rescue equipment.
- You may hear gasping or hyperventilating sounds.



This is known as Instinctive Drowning Response, and a person can only sustain these movements for 20-60 seconds before drowning. If you notice these or any other signs of someone struggling in water, call for help and ask someone to call 911. Rescue and remove the person from the water ONLY if you can do so without putting yourself in danger. Perform first aid and CPR if needed and if you are comfortable doing so. Visit [American Red Cross Water Safety page](#) for more information.

The above image is from [National Drowning Prevention Alliance](#), another great resource for information on water safety.

LOW HEAD DAM SAFETY



April is Low Head Dams Public Safety Awareness Month! According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), "A low head dam is a manufactured structure, built in a river or stream channel, extending fully across the banks. A low head dam is designed and built such that water flows continuously over the crest from bank to bank. If water levels rise downstream,

a submerged hydraulic jump can form which produces an upstream directed current that traps any recreationist who might go over the dam." Low head dams can look safe because of their low height and the tranquil water just upstream. However, the water falling over the dam creates a strong current that can trap and drown even the strongest swimmers.

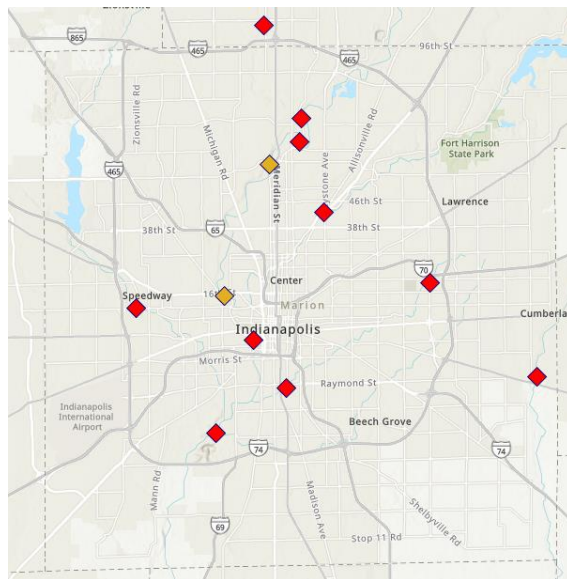
Where are low head dams located?

There are currently about 90 low head dams in Indiana, including 11 in Marion County. Check out this [interactive map](#) on Indiana Department of Natural Resources website to see where they are located.

How can you stay safe?

Low head dams are very dangerous and have been known to drown strong swimmers and people wearing personal flotation devices (PFDs). The best way to stay safe is to be aware of your surroundings and avoid low head dams.

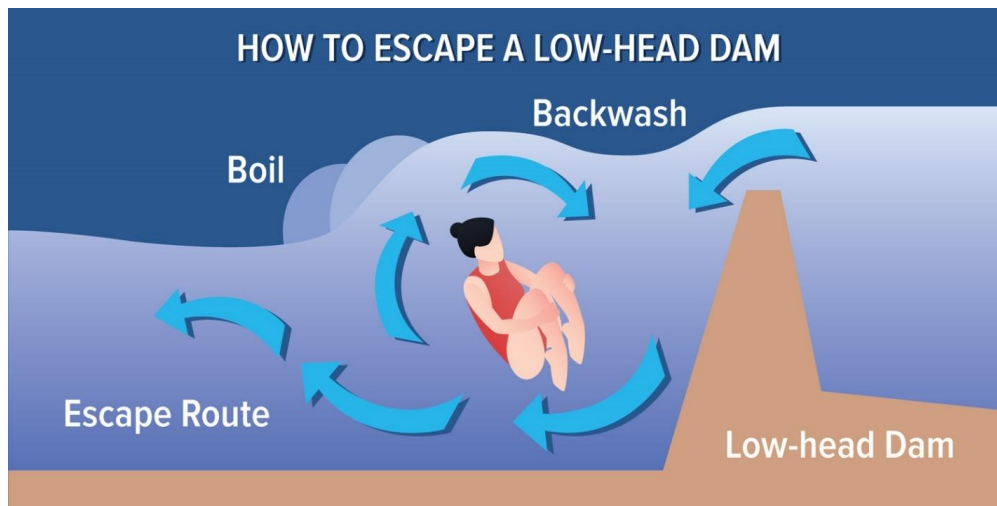
- Know where low head dams are located by studying a map before going out on the water. If you recreate in Indiana waterways often, consider bookmarking Indiana DNR's map of low head dams.
- Always let someone know where you are, when you will be there, and what time you plan on returning.
- Always wear a PFD.
- Obey all posted signage and barriers in the area. In Indiana, people are prohibited from accessing low head dams and the waters within 50 feet of the dams when warning signs are present.





Some examples of safety signs you may see near a low head dam.

- When kayaking, canoeing, or boating, be sure to turn around well before reaching the dam. If you re-enter the water downstream of the dam, enter far enough away from the dam that you don't get swept into the current.
- If you see a person trapped in the current (also called a Boil), DO NOT jump in after them or approach the hydraulic. About 25% of low head dam related deaths are from rescue attempts. Instead, call 911 immediately and wait on the shore until help arrives.
- If you find yourself trapped in a boil, tuck your chin into your chest, draw your knees up and wrap your arms around them (see image below). This may help to get pushed out of the current. After swimming away from the current, try to swim along the face of the dam towards the nearest bank.



To learn more:

[National Weather Service Avoid the Drowning Machine: Low Head Dam Public Safety Awareness Month](#)

[Indiana DNR Low Head Dams](#)

[Indiana Department of Homeland Security Low-Head Dams](#)

[IndyStar Article: Indy to remove low-head dam on White River where two kayakers drowned in April](#)

IMPORTANT DATES

Observances:

- Groundwater Awareness Week: March 9-15
- Low Head Dam Public Safety Awareness Month (April)
- Asthma Awareness Month (May)
- Drowning Prevention Month (May)
- National Weather Service Statewide Tornado Drill: March 11 (approx. 10:15 am)
- Earth Day: April 22
- World Asthma Day: May 6

MCPHD Offices Closed:

- Memorial Day: May 26

TAG (Technical Advisory Group Meetings):

- May 26

LOCAL RESOURCES



Marion County residents can dispose of unwanted and unused household hazardous waste and electronics on Saturdays at various locations across Indianapolis. For more information on times, locations, contact information, and what products are accepted, visit [## TRACKING UPDATES](http://Indy.gov>ToxDrop or call the Department of Public Works at 317-327-4000.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

We're moving! We are moving to a new website this spring. Stay tuned for more updates!

Daylight Savings Time begins March 9 at 2 am. When you set your clocks forward, don't forget to also check the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms!



*Marion County Public Health Department
Environmental Tracking*

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