

# THE MORNING CALL

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## **Claudia Ramos: Children with asthma look forward to future with cleaner air**

By Claudia Ramos  
August 8, 2015

Being a parent means doing all you can to keep your kids safe, happy and healthy. In my family, this involves a daily series of anticipations and adaptations to manage my son's asthma and keep him out of the hospital.

Unfortunately, this is a struggle familiar to many families throughout our state and our nation, because poor air quality and air pollution threaten the health of our children. To give our kids a healthy future and ensure they have clean air to breathe, we need to enact public health protections such as stronger ozone pollution standards.

My son Jesse is 11 years old and was diagnosed with asthma at 18 months of age. It is a condition we must work to keep under control each and every day through medication and lifestyle adjustments. We control for every possible asthma trigger for which we can be responsible. Inside our home, we have no carpeting, we have blinds instead of curtains, we keep stuffed animals in plastic containers, and we have no pets. We have implemented healthier diet changes for weight loss and better nutrition. This all helps to some degree, but I cannot control the quality of the air Jesse breathes when he steps outside.

It becomes particularly challenging to avoid asthma flare-ups this time of year, when hot summer temperatures exacerbate ozone pollution and make it harder for him to breathe. I receive air

quality alerts on my phone each day and I know that when hazy, hot and humid days with higher ozone smog levels are projected, Jesse has to limit his time outside.

We attend outdoor events in the early morning or evening when pollen and ozone levels tend to be lower, and we avoid walking long distances outdoors. Jesse uses an inhaler before he exercises, his swimming lessons are time-limited, and we even consider local air quality and temperature when we plan the destinations of our family vacations.

Having accurate information about air quality is crucial to my family's ability to plan and manage Jesse's asthma and overall health. It is frustrating to me that as a mother, the information I receive about ozone pollution levels does not reflect the latest science about harmful health impacts. I deserve to know the truth about the quality of the air my family is breathing.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has proposed updating the current outdated ozone pollution standard to make it stronger and better protect our health, which I fully support. Ozone is a dangerous and widespread pollutant, and children are exposed at higher levels than adults because they breathe faster and their lungs are still developing.

This is why leading health groups like the American Academy of Pediatrics and American Lung Association support a stronger, more protective ozone standard in the range of 60 parts per billion, down from the current 75 ppb.

Our family is fortunate in many ways when it comes to the support we have managing Jesse's asthma. He has a terrific doctor, and he has learned a great deal about successfully managing his asthma by attending the American Lung Association's annual Lehigh Valley Asthma Camp last month. At the camp, he met other kids with asthma who also enjoyed a summer camp experience they may not otherwise have because their asthma limits their activity. My husband volunteered as the camp's nurse last year, and this year our family volunteered as a unit.

I want our legislators in Washington, D.C., to know that families like mine are doing all we can to keep our kids healthy, but we also need their leadership. Stronger clean air standards such as those for ozone pollution are essential to protecting the health of our children.

Our family's struggle with asthma has become multigenerational, as my 4-year-old grandson was recently diagnosed with asthma as well. I hope EPA will soon finalize a stronger ozone standard, and I can both tell my son and grandson that healthier air is indeed in their future.

*Claudia Ramos lives in Freemansburg.*

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