



## Give kids a healthy future with stronger ozone pollution standards

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Earlier this summer, children from the Scranton area who are living with asthma gathered at Camp AsthmaCadabra at the YMCA's Camp Kresge in White Haven to help increase their self-confidence and enhance their ability to manage the disease. For children with asthma, it can be very isolating not to spend time outside with their peers when their asthma is not well-controlled or when poor air quality makes outdoor activity unsafe. This camp, a joint effort between the American Lung Association and the Max and Lorraine Foundation, provides an opportunity for them to feel like "normal" kids while under close medical supervision. I volunteer at the camp because I know it provides a great resource for our community — and I also support giving our kids a healthy future by enacting stronger ozone pollution standards to ensure they have clean air to breathe.

Asthma has necessitated countless trips to the emergency room for my son, Tim, who is now 23. Beginning when he was 2 years old, we would be in the emergency room twice per year with severe asthma attacks. In fourth grade, he was rushed to the hospital and nearly died — he spent five days in the pediatric Intensive Care Unit during that trip. I can't adequately convey the horror of watching your child gasp for breath. When we weren't in and out of hospitals throughout Tim's childhood, his quality of life was suffering. On days with high ozone smog levels, the air quality was not safe for Tim to be outdoors — which meant limited summer days outside with friends, no school sports.

According to the American Lung Association's "State of the Air 2015" report, Pennsylvanians are among the nearly half of all Americans — more than 138 million — who live in counties where ozone levels can sometimes make the air unhealthy to breathe. Ozone causes shortness of breath, wheezing and coughing; asthma attacks; and increased risk of lung respiratory infections. Because children's lungs are still developing, they have smaller airways and higher breathing rates, and they are more susceptible to the effects of ozone air pollution and bad air quality days.

There are more resources available for families coping with asthma today than I had while Tim was growing up, such as air quality alerts sent daily to smart phones. But independent scientists and physicians agree that ozone harms health at levels well below what is currently considered “safe.” Leading health groups like the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Public Health Association and the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America support a more protective ozone standard in the range of 60 parts per billion (ppb), down from the current 75 ppb.

Fortunately, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has proposed making our ozone pollution standard stronger. The most protective standard under consideration by EPA could prevent up to 7,900 premature deaths, 1.8 million asthma attacks in children and 1.9 million missed school days nationwide each year.

My family worked for years to keep my son healthy, and we now help other families by volunteering at Camp AsthmaCadabra. You can help too. I urge you to join me in telling President Barack Obama and the EPA to put the health of our children first and strengthen limits for ozone pollution.

Linda McGrath

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