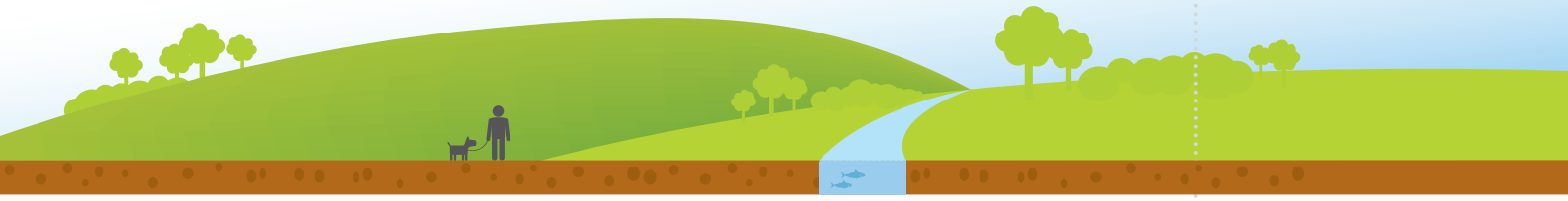


## DID YOU KNOW?

- Natural ecosystems purify our water, cleanse our air and deliver benefits to health & wellbeing by providing space for exercise & calm places for stressful times
- Significant investment in drinking water treatment in recent years has resulted in a downward trend of public supplies showing evidence of E.coli contamination though issues remain with group water schemes and private wells
- Air quality in Ireland is generally very good but between 150 and 200 deaths from lung cancer each year are linked to radon
- The bituminous coal ban led to a significant drop in cardiovascular and respiratory deaths since its introduction in Dublin in 1990



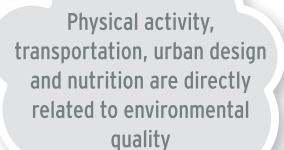
Air quality in Ireland is generally very good




Everyone should be encouraged to take full advantage of the tangible benefits to health that come from contact with a good-quality environment. Protecting the Irish environment plays a critical role in protecting the health of the population.

Clean air and water are essential to our health and wellbeing, but other health factors such as physical activity, transportation, urban design and nutrition are directly related to environmental quality. When ecosystems are maintained in good condition they provide further health benefits, with a growing body of evidence to demonstrate the value of contact with nature in prevention and treatment of conditions including stress, depression and obesity.

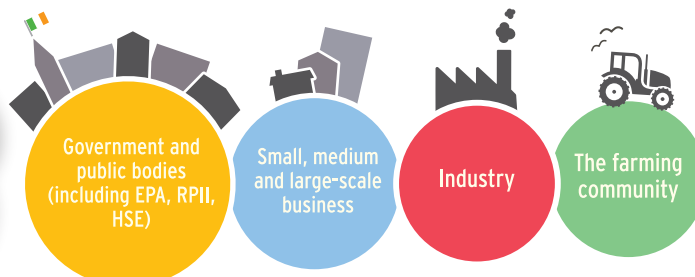
Of course, pollution in the environment can harm health. The World Health Organisation estimate that environmental hazards are responsible for as much as a quarter of the total burden of disease worldwide and as many as 13 million deaths could be prevented every year by improving environmental quality. The causes of most of these deaths are air pollution, poor water quality and insufficient sanitation, though other health risks in our environment include toxic chemicals, noise and waste. These risks are not confined to the developing world but also exist to a greater or lesser extent in all countries, including Ireland.



Physical activity, transportation, urban design and nutrition are directly related to environmental quality



To maintain and benefit from a healthy environment requires coordinated efforts from many.



## ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND HEALTH

The environment offers a wealth of benefits to health and wellbeing. Natural ecosystems and the biodiversity that they support not only provide essential food but also help to break down waste, purify water, cleanse the air and even serve as a source of pharmaceutical drugs, many of which have been derived from micro-organisms, fungi, plants and animals.

Participating in outdoor activities helps to maintain good health while research has shown a positive impact on mental health from exposure to natural environments. A clean, well managed environment is critical if people are to make good use of their green spaces.

### CLEAN WATER & HEALTH

#### Drinking Water

Any contamination of drinking water poses a health risk, especially to children, older people and those with compromised immune systems. To protect public health, the EPA adopts a risk-based approach to the enforcement of national drinking water regulations, focusing on issues that present the greatest risk to health. Significant investment in recent years has resulted in increased treatment, storage capacity and continuous online monitoring for drinking water. That effort is reflected in the downward trend of public supplies showing evidence of E.coli contamination in recent years.

#### Bathing Water

There are 135 designated bathing areas in Ireland. Over the past 10 years the quality of water at these sites has remained high, with the majority meeting required standards. Occasional toxic algal blooms can pose a health threat to bathers, as blue-green algae are toxic to humans and animals. You can find out about bathing water quality on the EPA's SPLASH website [splash.epa.ie](http://splash.epa.ie).

### CLEAN AIR & HEALTH

Harmful substances in the air can cause both immediate and long-term damage to health. They include natural materials and man-made pollutants as well as odour and noise. Protecting clean air is vital to human health.

Outdoor air pollution is associated with a range of health problems and causes over 300,000 premature deaths in the EU every year. In Ireland, air quality is generally good although monitoring shows that levels of some pollutants can reach concentrations that could impact on health. The Air Quality Index for Health provides information on current air quality with appropriate health advice. It is available on the EPA website at [airquality.epa.ie](http://airquality.epa.ie).

Indoors, the air pollutants of most concern include carbon monoxide, particulate matter and radon gas. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas with no colour, taste or smell. Certain parts of the country, mainly in the south east and west, are most at risk from radon. High indoor radon levels can occur anywhere therefore all householders, particularly those in High Radon Areas, should test their homes for radon. See the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland's website [www.rpii.ie](http://www.rpii.ie) for more information.

### CHEMICALS & OTHER ENVIRONMENT - HEALTH ISSUES

Our lives and society derive great benefits from chemicals but it is well recognised that when particular chemicals reach the wrong place, in the wrong amounts, these powerful agents can damage both the environment and our health. The health effects of exposure to hazardous chemicals can be direct such as skin irritations & chemical burns or more subtle, longer term impacts from chronic exposure which may not become evident for many years. Other issues with potential impact on health include pharmaceutical residues, nanomaterials, heavy metals, noise and electromagnetic radiation.

AIR  
POLLUTION IS  
HARMFUL TO  
HEALTH



The EPA focus on issues that pose the greatest risk to health

Exposure to harmful chemicals can cause skin irritations



The water quality is high at most of the 135 designated bathing areas



Protecting clean air is vital to human health

Find info on current air quality & health at [airquality.epa.ie](http://airquality.epa.ie)