



Which NYC neighborhoods have the best—and worst—air quality, according To New Yorkers? - by Ioana Neamt

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Living in a highly trafficked city like New York comes with plenty of advantages, but it also comes with some unwanted “perks” like congestion, noise, and pollution. So, where in NYC do people prioritize air quality?

New York, New York—the Big Apple is one of the most visited and most prosperous cities in the world. People flock to NYC from all around the globe, either just visiting, or looking to fulfill the American dream of living a glamorous life in the heart of Manhattan. However, living in a city this big and this popular isn’t always all that it’s cracked up to be.

With so many people constantly coming and going, the streets of NYC are always jam-packed with locals and tourists alike. Traffic is notoriously heavy in the city, and commute times can often stretch for hours, especially if you’re going from borough to borough. Manhattan is one of the densest, priciest, and busiest business districts in the world, so you’ll have a hard time finding a lunch spot if you work in one of its skyscrapers. Over the past few years, Brooklyn and Queens have started to catch up, and many people who were priced out of Manhattan have migrated to other boroughs, which only serves to boost demand in those areas.

All this commotion inevitably creates significant environmental problems for New Yorkers. The crowded skyline often makes it hard to see the sun or get natural light in Manhattan, while the packed streets and crowded shops create a lot of noise during the day. Not to mention that all those cars stuck in traffic and commutes boost pollution in the city, making the air a little heavy around rush hour.

New Yorkers, like everyone else, value their health and wellbeing, and many of them are factoring in air quality when deciding to buy or rent a home. Now more than ever, health is a priority, not only in New York City but all over the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic will leave a permanent mark on the way people live and work, and also on

where they choose to do these things. As more and more people transition to remote work, living in crowded urban areas has already lost a lot of its appeal for many. No longer constrained by their commute, many New Yorkers might choose to move to a greener, less polluted area, especially if they have or plan to have children. Boroughs like Queens or the Bronx will become a lot more appealing for those looking for more space, less traffic, and of course, better prices.

With that in mind, we wanted to check which areas of New York City have the best – and worst – air quality, according to the people who live there. We turned to the city's 311 database to look at all the air quality-related complaints filed by New Yorkers this year, and compare them to the same time last year. Based on their complaints, we extracted the neighborhoods or community districts with the most–and least–air quality complaints filed between January 1st through June 15th, 2020.

Greenpoint/Williamsburg, UWS had the Most Air Quality Complaints in NYC

As it turns out, the worst air quality in NYC is found not in Manhattan, but Brooklyn. According to 175 complaints filed by New Yorkers this year, the Greenpoint/Williamsburg area isn't exactly the most breathable in the city—quite the contrary. Most of these complaints are about fumes emanated by idle vehicles, which is a very common occurrence in traffic jams.

It would seem that there's worse traffic congestion in these buzzing Brooklyn neighborhoods than in other parts of the city. It makes sense, too, as both Greenpoint and Williamsburg are highly sought-after by homeowners and are increasing in popularity. At the same time, many of those who live in these areas commute to work in Manhattan, which leads to intense daily traffic in these neighborhoods.

Greenpoint/Williamsburg was part of the top 10 last year, too, with 235 air quality-related complaints filed during the first half of 2019. The number of complaints filed decreased by 60 year-over-year, however, the neighborhood climbed three spots, landing at #1 in 2020.

The Upper West Side is a close second, with 151 air quality complaints filed so far in 2020. Once again, the bulk of complaints are about idle vehicles and fumes, which gives you a better picture of the traffic in this part of Manhattan. Still, the number of complaints filed in this area is significantly lower than in 2019, when the UWS was at the top of the list.

Following at number three on our list is Astoria, where residents filed 132 complaints related to air quality so far in 2020. Astoria wasn't even on the top 10 list last year when just 91 complaints were filed with the 311 service. Heavy development in Queens might have contributed to the rise in traffic, pollution, and consequently, in complaints about air quality.

The community district covering Midtown Manhattan is another part of NYC where the air is not quite as clean as you'd like it to be. A total of 112 complaints related to air quality were filed with the 311 service by residents since January. That's 145 fewer complaints than in 2019, which helped Midtown climb down a spot on the list this year.

Midtown Manhattan is probably the densest part of NYC, at least during the day, when its skyscrapers are filled with office workers, shoppers, and tourists. Its narrow streets are always buzzing with cars and car horns, especially at rush hour, when everyone is trying to get from home to work or vice versa.

Other parts of the city with low air quality include Rego Park/Forest Hills in Queens, Park Slope/Carroll Gardens in Brooklyn, and Washington Heights/Inwood, Clinton/Chelsea, the Upper East Side, and the Lower East Side/Chinatown in Manhattan.

Now let's look at the parts of NYC where the air is a little bit more refreshing.

Residents in the Bronx Filed the Least Air Quality Complaints in 2020

The Bronx might not be the first borough on the list for tourists or people moving to New York City, but following the pandemic, it might start to attract home buyers and renters. Those who have had enough living in confined, cramped spaces, working in open, noisy offices, and wasting hours on lengthy commutes might start considering a move to the Bronx.

Home prices and rents are considerably lower than those found in Manhattan, Brooklyn, or even Queens. Pair that with a job that now allows you to work remotely, and you can end up saving a lot of time and money, yet still call yourself a New Yorker. The fact that the Bronx seems to have cleaner air than the other boroughs is a bonus for health-conscious home buyers and renters.

According to complaints filed with the 311 service so far this year, 6 of the 10 neighborhoods with the best air quality in the city are in the Bronx. These parts of NYC recorded the lowest number of air quality-related complaints filed by New Yorkers, which is a good sign that traffic and pollution aren't as rampant here compared to other boroughs.

At the top of the list is Morrisania/Crotona, where just eight complaints were filed since January 2020. Following close is Elmhurst/Corona in Queens, where residents filed 11 complaints with the 311 service related to air quality. At number three on our list of neighborhoods with the best air quality in NYC is Mott Haven/Melrose in the Bronx, with 11 complaints filed. Next up is Highbridge/Concourse, where just 13 air quality-related complaints were filed during the past year and a half or so.

If you want to move to Brooklyn and breathability is one of your main concerns, then Brownsville should be on your list. Brooklyners filed a mere 14 complaints about air quality here in the first half of 2020, making this neighborhood the fifth most breathable in NYC. East New York/Starrett City, also in Brooklyn, is next, with 15 complaints filed with 311 this year.

The other "breathable" neighborhoods on our list include Kingsbridge Heights/Bedford (16 complaints), Belmont/East Tremont (17 complaints), Parkchester/Soundview (18 complaints), and Rockaway/Broad Channel in Queens (18 complaints).

Morrisania/Crotona was home to the lowest number of air quality complaints in 2019, too, with just 10 complaints filed concerning air quality filed from January 1st through June 15th. Most of the neighborhoods on our list recorded fewer air quality complaints in 2020 compared to 2019, but there were a couple of worrying exceptions, as well.

Belmont/East Tremont is the only area on our list that saw more complaints filed in 2020 compared to last year, although the difference isn't necessarily cause for concern. Elmhurst/Corona and Brownsville, while they recorded fewer complaints this year, climbed three and four spots on the list, respectively. As boroughs like Brooklyn and Queens continue to gain popularity, increased construction and traffic come with the territory.

To view the full report [CLICK HERE](#)

Methodology: We used the 311 NYC service database to extract all non-emergency complaints filed in New York City that relate to air quality. 311 is a public service platform that handles requests for government and non-emergency services. Residents can access government information and file complaints related to crucial services like parking and traffic, noise and air quality, construction, transportation, and more.

We extracted all complaints filed under the Air Quality category, that were recorded during January 1st – June 15th, 2019, and compared them to the number of requests filed during January 1st – June 15th, 2020. We then filtered the total number of complaints by neighborhood, to extract the neighborhoods with the most—and the least—complaints related to air quality.

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