

FACTSHEET Wildfires

Health Promotion and Protection



Health Threat from Wildfire Smoke

Smoke from wildfires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. Smoke can irritate your eyes and respiratory system, and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases.

How to tell if smoke could be affecting you

Smoke can cause—

- Coughing
- A scratchy throat
- Irritated, runny nose and sinuses
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Headaches
- A runny nose
- Worsening of asthma symptoms

If you have heart or lung disease, smoke might make your symptoms worse.

People who have heart disease might experience —

- Chest pain
- Rapid heartbeat
- Shortness of breath

Smoke may worsen symptoms for people who have pre-existing respiratory conditions, such as asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), in the following ways:

- Inability to breathe normally
- Cough with or without mucus
- Chest discomfort
- Wheezing and shortness of breath

When smoke levels are high enough, even healthy people may experience some of these symptoms.

Know whether you are at risk

If you have heart or lung disease, such as congestive heart failure, angina, COPD, emphysema, or asthma, you may be at higher risk of having health problems than healthy people.

Older adults and children are more likely to be affected by smoke. Older adults may be more at risk because they are more likely to have heart or lung diseases than younger people.

Children are more likely to be affected because their airways are still developing and because they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults. Children also are more likely to be active outdoors.

Protect yourself

Limit your exposure to smoke. The following are ways to protect your health:

Pay attention to local air quality reports. Listen and watch for news or health warnings about smoke. Check the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) for the area nearest you at www.airhealth.ca. Also pay attention to public health messages about taking additional safety measures.

For air quality updates sent directly to your email, sign up at E-Somg plus, www.atl.ec.gc.ca/airquality/esmog.cgi, an automatic quality notification services.

If you are advised to stay indoors, keep indoor air as clean as possible. Keep windows and doors closed unless it is extremely hot outside. Run an air conditioner if you have one, but keep the fresh-air intake closed and the filter clean to prevent outdoor smoke from getting inside. If you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere. **Do not add to indoor pollution.** When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns, such as candles, fireplaces, or gas stoves. Do not vacuum, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home. Do not smoke, because smoking puts even more pollution into the air.

Follow your doctor's advice about medicines and about your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease, Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.

Do not rely on dust masks for protection. Paper "comfort" or "dust" masks commonly found at hardware stores are designed to trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke.

Safe evacuation

As you evacuate and then return home, be cautious and take the same safety measures you would when there is no emergency: buckle up and do not drink and drive.

Also, make sure that children are properly buckled up and in the rear seat. In the event of a power outage special consideration should be given to food safety, safe drinking water, carbon monoxide poisoning, and power line hazards.

Other Useful Information

Food Safety

Food may not be safe to eat during or after an emergency. Find information on food safety by going to www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/environmental/food-safety.asp

Water Safety

During a disaster, water can become contaminated with bacteria, chemicals or other substances that can cause illness. www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/environmental/water-safety.asp

Carbon Monoxide

Preventing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning After an Emergency
www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/environmental/carbon-monoxide.asp

Power Failures

www.emo.gov.ns.ca/content/power-failures