

# Seasonal Health Alert: Wildfire Smoke

## Health impacts from wildfire smoke

Wildfire smoke contains small particles and chemicals, which can cause minor to serious health effects. Minor symptoms include a burning sensation in your eyes, a sore throat, runny nose, headaches, wheezing, coughing, and shortness of breath. In more serious cases, exposure to smoke can aggravate existing lung, heart, and circulatory conditions, aggravate asthma attacks, or cause chest tightness.

Although smoke is unhealthy for everyone, some people are more susceptible than others: infants and children, people who are pregnant, older adults, and people with heart or lung diseases, diabetes, or respiratory illnesses (including COVID-19). If you have a medical condition, talk with your healthcare provider about how to decrease your risk from smoke.

## How to protect your health around wildfire smoke

- Stay informed about air quality conditions and wildfire activity with the [Washington State Smoke blog](#).
- Staying indoors in “clean air” is the best way to stay safe around smoke. Keep the air in your home clean by:
  - Closing your windows and doors
  - Improving filtration: build your own [box fan filter](#) or use a portable [air cleaner](#) with a particle air (HEPA or MERV 13) filter. If you have a forced air heating/air conditioning system, use filters with the highest designated filter rating that your system can handle. Keep the air on “recirculation” mode.
  - Avoiding additional sources of particles, such as using candles or incense, smoking, broiling or frying food, and vacuuming (unless the vacuum has a HEPA filter).
- Use masks, when appropriate:
  - Cloth and surgical masks will not filter out smoke particles.
  - [Properly fitted NIOSH-certified N95 respirator masks](#) will filter out the particles. Ask the advice of a healthcare provider before using these masks on infants or small children, people with lung disease, heart disease, or other chronic illnesses.
- Know where to go for relief:
  - If you are unable to keep the air in your home clean, consider going to an indoor space with air conditioning—a friend or relative’s home, city- or county-provided healthy air centers, etc.
- Get symptom relief:
  - Use artificial tear eye drops to help flush the smoke from your eyes.
  - Keep yourself, family, pets, and livestock well hydrated. Store bottles or containers of water for use in emergency situations.
  - Consider reducing physical activity, especially if you are sensitive to smoke or if you have a lung and/or heart condition, such as asthma.
  - Call the Washington Poison Center (1-800-222-1222) with any questions or concerns with wildfire smoke and your health.
- [Have a plan](#) if you need to evacuate:
  - Create an emergency kit: at a minimum, include copies of important documents, prescriptions and other needed medications, pet food and water, clothing, cell phone chargers, and enough non-perishable food and water for several days.
  - Print out a map marked with at least two evacuation routes.
  - Have enough fuel in your vehicle to travel into a safe area.
  - Call 911 for any emergency.