

Live Well, Work Well



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STAYING HEALTHY AND SAFE DURING WILDFIRES

In many parts of the United States, the risk of wildfires begins early spring and continues into the fall. Being prepared for fire activity is crucial if you live in a wildfire-prone area. Wildfires can be a serious threat to lives and property—and smoke pollution can affect your health. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), wildfire smoke mostly consists of fine inhalable particles known as PM2.5, which is of greatest concern to public health. Air pollution from large wildfires can be widespread and linger over other states or countries.

This article highlights strategies for staying healthy and safe amid wildfires.

Health and Safety Measures

When wildfires create smoky conditions, everyone needs to reduce their exposure to the smoke. Wildfire smoke irritates your eyes, nose, throat and lungs. It can make it hard to breathe and make you cough or wheeze.

Consider the following tips for protecting you and your family during a wildfire:

- **Follow guidance from local and state officials.** Pay attention to emergency alerts for information and instructions, and listen to authorities for guidance on evacuating your home and when it's safe to return.
- **Keep smoke outside.** Staying indoors is highly recommended for reducing exposure to smoke pollution, but contaminants can make their way inside. To protect yourself, you should:
 - Choose a room you can easily close off from the outside air in your home. It could be helpful to use a portable air cleaner or filter to maintain clean air in the designated room or space. A quality heating, ventilating and air conditioning system with air filters can also help remove particles from the air.
 - Keep all doors and windows shut in your vehicle and put the air on the recirculate setting.

- **Wear a fitted N95 mask.** The EPA recommends using a particulate respirator labeled NIOSH, N95 or P100. Two straps above and below your ears will create a good seal. Masks only protect against particles, so experts advise staying indoors on poor air-quality days.
- **Protect pets.** Smoke can also irritate your pet's eyes and respiratory tract. Animals with heart or lung disease and older pets are especially at risk from smoke and should be watched closely.
- **Track wildfires.** Be prepared for wildfires and smoke pollution by tracking fires near you. For example, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's [fire weather outlook website](#) maps fire watches and warnings.
- **Monitor your local air quality.** Websites, including the EPA's [AirNow.gov](#), can explain which air quality levels may be hazardous and how much outdoor activity you should engage in. Apps reporting on local air quality are also available.
- **Pay attention to health symptoms.** Children and people with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or heart disease need to be especially careful about breathing wildfire smoke. Older adults and pregnant people are also more likely to get sick if they breathe in wildfire smoke.

For More Information

During wildfire season, it's important to monitor wildfires that may be happening in or around the country to best protect your health and safety.

Monitor local authorities for updates, and contact your health care provider with further questions about how wildfires can impact your health.

Source: Zywave