



LASSEN COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

Wildfire Smoke Health Tips



As fire agencies battle the wildfires, there are measures we all can take to protect our health from the harmful pollutants filling our air. Smoke is a respiratory irritant that can cause scratchy throat, irritated eyes and nose, and can worsen conditions such as asthma, other chronic lung conditions, or heart disease. Pregnant women, children, elderly people, smokers, and people who work or exercise outdoors are also at higher risk for complications from smoke exposure.

Here are some tips you can follow to protect you and your family members from unhealthy air:

Stay indoors. Choose indoor options especially indoor play options for children when air pollution levels are unhealthy. (Refer to the Air Quality Index (AQI). Keep your windows and doors closed. Use your air conditioning system on recirculation mode and be sure the fresh air intake is closed and the filter is clean. If you have a whole house fan, turn it off when air quality is poor unless it is extremely hot. Do not use swamp coolers or air conditioning units that draw in outdoor air. Consider airing out the house when outdoor air improves. If needed, go to public places such as grocery stores and movie theatres where there is effective air conditioning in place.

Reduce outdoor activity. Reducing your physical activity in outdoor areas lowers the amount of polluted air your body intakes. Curtail your involvement in outdoor activities and events that require prolonged exposure and strenuous exercise or sports participation. Even healthy people are at risk. Those with heart or lung disease should take further measures to avoid prolonged or heavy exertion and outdoor exposure.

Consult your physician. If you or a family member suffers from a heart or lung ailment, talk with your doctor. He or she can advise you on treatment or whether and when you should leave the area. Call your doctor immediately if the condition worsens. For those who suffer from chronic diseases, have an adequate supply of medications (5 days or more) available.

Have a plan. Be sure to have a family emergency plan and kit with an adequate supply of food, water, medications and necessities for at least 72 hours in the event that you need to stay home or evacuate.

Keep Informed. Listen to your local news and weather forecasts and air quality alerts provided by Lassen County Public Health Department. If the air quality in your area worsens take necessary precautions and plan your activities accordingly.

Use of Respirators (not Masks). (NIOSH approved disposable respirators N95 and P100 only.) Respirators can be beneficial to reduce particulate inhalation. Dust and surgical masks are not effective. They should only be used after first implementing other methods of reducing smoke exposure. People with heart or lung conditions should consult their doctor before using a respirator as it takes more effort to breathe through a respirator. Respirators only filter out particles and do not provide oxygen. To be effective, they must fit snugly over the nose and under the chin. It is most effective to take other measures to avoid smoke exposure first.

For more information about wildfire smoke and your health contact Lassen County Public Health Department at 530-251-8183. For air quality information visit www.lassenair.org.