

Forest Fire Smoke and Your Health

Forest fire smoke can affect your health. Persons with respiratory or heart conditions, such as asthma, can experience worsened symptoms during minor and severe smoke events. During severe smoke events even healthy individuals can be affected and may experience irritation of the eyes, throat and possibly shortness of breath.

Everyone – and in particular those with pre-existing respiratory or heart conditions – should monitor their symptoms and seek medical care if symptoms worsen.

Who is at risk?

Those with pre-existing heart and respiratory conditions such as asthma are most at risk; however, everyone can be at risk during a severe smoke event and should monitor their symptoms. Take appropriate precautionary measures and seek medical care if symptoms worsen.

How do I protect myself?

During a severe smoke event:

- Reduce or avoid strenuous outdoor activities – especially if you experience symptoms such as coughing and throat irritation. Children, the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions, such as heart and respiratory disease, should be especially cautious.
- Do not rely on dust masks, bandanas, and cloths (even if wet), since they are designed to trap large particles and not designed to protect lungs from smoke.
- Reduce or eliminate exposure to outside air when inside (e.g.) close windows and close ventilation systems that bring outdoor air indoors.
- Stay inside and turn on your air conditioner (check to make sure it does not bring outdoor air indoors). Or, go to an air-conditioned public space (mall, library, church) to reduce exposure to outdoor air.
- If you have an HEPA air cleaner that will reduce levels of small particles in indoor air, use it and stay in the room where it is located.
- Avoid tobacco smoke exposure - smoking puts added stress on your lungs and those around you.

Where can I go for more information?

- Current air quality conditions and the air quality index (AQI) can be accessed from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment <http://www.environment.gov.sk.ca/airqualityindex>
- Visit HealthLine Online at www.healthlineonline.ca for advice on symptoms and precautions. HealthLine is available 24/7 across the province at **811**.

June 2015