

Reduce your exposure before and during a wildfire

Introduction

If a wildfire in your area could create smoky conditions, you can reduce your exposure by following these guidelines.

Preparation

In preparation for the fire season or a smoke event, have enough food on hand to last several days and at least a five-day supply of medication in order to minimize driving. Foods stored for use during the fire season should not require frying or broiling, which can add particles to indoor air. Avoid vacuuming (except with HEPA filter-equipped vacuums) because most vacuum cleaners disperse very fine dust into the air.

During a wildfire

If you have moderate to severe heart or lung disease, consider staying with relatives or friends who live away from the smoke. If significant smoke is already present, evaluate whether evacuation might cause greater exposure than staying at home and using other precautions.

All people in a smoky area (except firefighters or emergency personnel) should avoid strenuous work or exercise outdoors. Avoid driving whenever possible. If driving is necessary, run the air conditioner on the “recycle” or “re-circulate” mode to avoid drawing smoky air into the car.

Closing up a home by shutting windows and doors can give some protection from smoke. Most air conditioners are designed by default to re-circulate indoor air. Those systems that have both “outdoor air” and “re-circulate” settings need to be set on “re-circulate” during fire or smoke events to prevent smoky air from being drawn into the building. (Note: This does not apply to HVAC systems in office and commercial buildings.)

For more information:

Technical advice and information:

**Oregon Public Health Division
Emergency Preparedness Program**
Phone: 971-673-1244
Fax: 971-673-1309

[http://public.health.oregon.gov/
preparedness](http://public.health.oregon.gov/preparedness)

**U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency (EPA)**

www.epa.gov/californiafires/

**Federal Emergency Management
Agency (FEMA)**

www.fema.gov/hazard/wildfire

**Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC)**

[www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/
wildfires](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires)

and

[www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/
asthma/wildfires.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/asthma/wildfires.htm)

**Oregon Department of
Environmental Quality (DEQ)
Air Quality Index**

www.deq.state.or.us/aqi/

Oregon
Health
Authority

OREGON PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION
Emergency Preparedness Program

Once you have closed up your home, avoid strenuous activity, which can make you breathe harder and faster. Drink plenty of fluids to keep your respiratory membranes moist. You may even want to breathe through a moistened washcloth, as long as it does not interfere with your ability to breathe.

Room cleaners, such as electrostatic precipitators and mechanical filters, may be effective at reducing indoor particulate counts. However, avoid units that use ozone-generating technology. Ozone is known to cause respiratory irritation and does not remove airborne particulates.

NIOSH-certified disposable respirators (N95 or P100), available in hardware or other stores, may provide some level of protection from exposure to particles in smoke, as long as you choose a close-fitting model and size and properly use it. One-strap paper masks, surgical masks or other face coverings provide far less or no protection.

If smoke levels increase to very unhealthy or hazardous levels, it may be appropriate for some people — such as those with asthma, emphysema and bronchitis — to stay in a clean room in the home, relocate temporarily to a cleaner air shelter, or to leave the area entirely if it is possible and safe to do so.