

ARE YOU READY?

How to Prepare for Wildfire Smoke

Preparing for wildfires may not occur to you if you don't live in a hot, dry, windy area. Even if you feel safe from the flames, wildfire smoke can travel far and affect anyone, quickly making the air dangerous to breathe. As the risk of wildfires grows with climate change, being prepared is more important than ever. Here are a few tips to keep you and your loved ones safe.

What is wildfire smoke? Why is it dangerous?

In the event of a wildfire, smoke can make the air unsafe to breathe. Wildfire smoke is a mix of gases and small particles from burning plants, buildings and other materials. Even if you are thousands of miles away from an active wildfire, the smoke may spread to your region. Wildfire smoke can be dangerous right away. Anyone can get sick from breathing wildfire smoke, but people with asthma, heart disease and lung disease are at higher risk. So are children and people who are pregnant.

Breathing in wildfire smoke may cause:

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Trouble breathing
- Asthma attacks
- Stinging eyes
- Scratchy throat
- Runny nose
- Irritated sinuses
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Chest pain
- Fast heartbeat



What can I do to prepare for wildfire smoke?

Stay alert. Learn where you can get alerts about wildfire smoke in your area. This may include air quality reports such as the Fire and Smoke Map ([fire.airnow.gov](https://www.fire.airnow.gov)), public service announcements and social media updates to warn you if a wildfire and/or smoke will affect you.

Stock up on essentials. To avoid having to go outside when it's smoky, stock up on medications and groceries. Cooking inside can make the air more unsafe to breathe, so buy food that does not have to be cooked.

Keep a supply of N95 masks. N95 masks can protect you from wildfire smoke if you have to go outside, but choosing the correct size is key. You will know that you have the correct size if the mask fits over your nose and under your chin with no gaps. The type and number of straps are also important. N95 masks with two straps that go around your head are ideal. Masks with only one strap or two straps that go around your ears are not made to seal tightly to the face. Dust masks and bandanas are also not good for protecting you from wildfire smoke.

Have a clean air room. Choose a room in your home with no fireplace and as few windows and doors as possible. This will be your clean air room. Buy an air filter for the room and follow instructions on when to replace the filters.

What can I do if wildfire smoke is affecting my area?



Follow instructions from local officials. Pay attention to air quality reports near you to track how unsafe the air is. Stay alert because you may need to leave the area if the wildfire is moving towards you.

Protect your health. The best way to protect yourself from wildfire smoke is to stay indoors or limit your time outdoors. This is very important for those who have heart or lung disease or weakened immune systems, as well as children and those who are pregnant. If you must be outside for any reason, wear an N95 mask to stay safe.

Do not add to indoor air pollution. You should avoid burning candles or using gas, propane or wood-burning stoves or fireplaces. Do not fry or broil meat, smoke tobacco products or vacuum. All of these can make indoor air pollution worse and put you at risk of experiencing harmful health effects.

What should I do after wildfire smoke has cleared?

Continue to check air quality reports. You may no longer smell or see smoke in the air, but this doesn't always mean the air is now healthy to breathe. Stay aware of air quality reports and health warnings near you, even after you think you are safe.

Protect yourself from ash. Wildfires can leave behind ash, which may cause irritation to your nose, eyes or skin. Avoid direct contact with ash by wearing long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks, an N95 mask and protective eyewear. This is important if you are cleaning up ash, which should be done safely. Certain actions such as sweeping dry ash will kick ash up into the air. Before sweeping indoor and outdoor hard surfaces, mist them with water to keep dust down. Follow with wet mopping. Use as little water as possible since contact with wet ash may result in chemical burns.

Check the safety of food and water sources. Wildfire ash can fall onto outdoor plants, making their fruits and vegetables unsafe to eat. Wash any homegrown fruits or vegetables from trees or gardens. Private wells may also become unsafe to use for drinking water and other purposes. Talk to your local health department to have a licensed professional check for possible risks before using your well water.



Where can I learn more?

AirNow offers credible, updated information about the air quality near you with its Fire and Smoke Map at fire.airnow.gov. For additional information on how to stay safe from wildfire smoke, check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at cdc.gov/air/wildfire-smoke.