

ADVERSE HEALTH EFFECTS FROM SMOKE

People at increased risk for adverse health effects from smoke:

- People with existing lung conditions— such as asthma, lung cancer, chronic obstructive lung disease (COPD) which includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema.
- People with existing cardiovascular conditions including angina, previous heart attack, congestive heart failure, or irregular heartbeat.
- Infants and young children Infants and young children may be at risk because they have faster breathing rates and immature immune systems that may make them more at risk.
- Elderly The elderly tend to be more at risk because their respiratory, cardiovascular and immune systems are not as strong as they may have been.
- Pregnant women During pregnancy, both mother and fetus may be harmed by forest fire smoke because the smoke contains many of the same compounds as cigarette smoke.
- People with diabetes may risk because they may have underlying conditions such as cardiovascular disease.
- Outdoor workers and athletes are at risk if they are breathing deeply and rapidly.
- may have compromised lung functions.

Health Effects of Smoke Exposure due to Forest Fires

In the first minutes or hours, smoke causes sore eyes, tears, cough and runny nose. If the smoke lasts days to weeks or is very heavy, it can cause lung problems and long-lasting cough.

The unhealthiest material in smoke is the small particles. They can make heart and lung diseases like asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and congestive heart failure worse. Elders are also at increased risk. The small particles may make it harder to breathe, or make you cough.

Here are some things you can do if smoke begins to bother you:

1. Don't work outside if it makes you tired or short of breath. Don't let the kids play outdoors.
2. Don't smoke. Stay away from people who do smoke.
3. Stay inside with the windows and doors closed.
4. If you have room air cleaners with HEPA filters turn them on.

5. Don't burn anything, including wood stoves, gas stoves and even candles. This can make the problems worse. Don't fry or broil foods.
6. If you are in your car or truck, keep the windows closed and put the air system on "re-circulate" so you don't suck smoky air inside.
7. If you have chest tightness, chest pain, shortness of breath or severe fatigue, see your health provider. You should do this even if you don't usually have heart or lung problems.
8. If you have neighbours, friends or relatives that live alone, check to make sure they are OK. Elders and people with heart or lung conditions may get sick from the smoke.
9. Be extra careful about heat in houses of people who live alone. When they close their doors and windows to keep the smoke out, their houses may get very hot. This can give them heat exhaustion or heatstroke. They can use fans to move air around inside their houses.
10. Most masks are not helpful. The particles are so small they can go right through them. It is better to stay inside with the windows closed.
11. If you have asthma, heart or lung disease, be especially careful about monitoring your condition. Take all of the medicine you are supposed to take and do everything your nurse or doctor tells you to do. Make sure you have a week's supply of your medication available. Have a written asthma management plan if you or a family member has asthma.
12. Be sure to keep at least 5 days supply of medication on hand.
13. Talk to your nurse or doctor if you have any other concerns about your health.

For further information:

You can also call the Health Line at 1-877-800-0002

Or see <http://www.environment.gov.sk.ca/fire/>