



SAN BENITO COUNTY

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

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Healthy People in Healthy Communities

Press Release

California Wildfires Affecting Air Quality *Check air quality monitors for up-to-date information*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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California is experiencing unprecedented wildfires this summer affecting large parts of the State. Although San Benito County has not been directly impacted by major wildfires this season, wildfire smoke can travel hundreds of miles and affect large geographic areas. In addition, because it is summer time, many families are traveling to areas affected by the fires. Air quality and smokiness can change quickly. Families should consult the air quality of their destinations when making plans.

Wildfire smoke contains very small particulate matter that is breathed deep into the lungs. This form of air pollution is linked to a number of health problems, including coughing, wheezing, reduced lung function, asthma attacks, heart attacks and strokes. It can have long-term health impacts. Additionally, wildfire smoke may contain unknown chemicals and particles from manmade materials that have burned (homes, cars, etc.).

Some groups of people are more sensitive to the adverse health effects of wildfire smoke.

They include:

- people with cardiovascular disease (diseases of the heart and blood vessels)
- people with lung disease, including asthma and COPD
- babies, children and teenagers
- older adults
- persons with obesity or diabetes
- expectant mothers.

Children are especially at risk for health effects from exposure to wildfire smoke and ash, mostly because their lungs are still growing. Children who breathe in wildfire smoke and ash can have chest pain and tightness; trouble breathing; wheezing; coughing; nose, throat, and eye burning; dizziness; or other symptoms. Children with asthma, allergies, or chronic health issues may have more trouble breathing when smoke or ash is present.

Note that some areas are also affected by extreme heat and people who are not acclimated to the higher temperature, or are dehydrated, may experience additional stresses on their heart and lungs.

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What should we do?

San Benito County Public Health Services recommends

- avoiding areas with poor air quality due to wildfire smoke, especially if traveling with people in the sensitive groups above;
- if you are in a location with poor air quality, monitor conditions frequently and follow EPA guidelines to reduce smoke exposure and reduce health consequences;
- monitor air quality (Air Quality Index) at EPA AirNow https://www.airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=topics.smoke_wildfires and
- review attached EPA General Fact Sheet and EPA/PEHSU guidelines for children

For more information on the services Public Health Services provides please call (831) 637-5367, or go to San Benito Public Health Services website

<http://hhsa.cosb.us/publichealth/>.

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Protecting Children from Wildfire Smoke and Ash

Background

- Children are especially at risk for health effects from exposure to wildfire smoke and ash, mostly because their lungs are still growing.
- Wildfire concerns include the fire itself, the smoke and ash, and the chemicals from materials that have burned, such as furniture.
- Smoke can travel hundreds of miles from the source of a fire. Pay attention to local air quality reports during fire season, even if no fire is nearby.

Health Effects from Wildfire Smoke and Ash

- Children who breathe in wildfire smoke and ash can have chest pain and tightness; trouble breathing; wheezing; coughing; nose, throat, and eye burning; dizziness; or other symptoms.
- Children with asthma, allergies, or chronic health issues may have more trouble breathing when smoke or ash is present.

Preparing for Wildfires

- Pay attention to local air quality reports. Stay alert to smoke-related news coverage and public health advisories.
- Look up your local [Air Quality Index \(AQI\)](#) on the [AirNow](#) (www.airnow.gov) web site.
- If [Enviroflash](#) is available for your area, sign up for air quality alerts. (<http://www.enviroflash.info/>).

- Create a "clean room" in your home. Choose a room with few windows and doors. Buy a portable air cleaner you can use in this room. Never use an ozone-generating air cleaner.
- Stock up on food, medicine and child care supplies before the threat of a wildfire.
- Remember that you may need to leave your home. Plan for it and prepare your children.

During Wildfires

- Continue to listen to local reports and public health warnings.
- Keep children indoors with the doors and windows closed. Use your "clean room". If you have an air conditioner, run it with the fresh-air intake closed to keep outdoor smoke from getting indoors. Use your portable air cleaner as well. Reduce health risks by avoiding strenuous activities.
- Keep the indoor air as clean as possible. Do not smoke. Do not use gas, propane, or wood-burning stoves, fireplaces, or candles. Never use ozone-generating air cleaners. Never use natural gas or gasoline-powered generators indoors. Do not use spray cans. Do not fry or broil meat. Do not vacuum. All of these can lead to poor air quality.
- A good time to open windows to air out the house and clean away dust indoors is once air quality improves (check AirNow for updates).
- Use common sense to guide your child's activity. If it looks or smells smoky outside, if local air quality is reported as poor, or if local officials are giving health warnings, wait until air quality improves before your family is active outdoors.

Special considerations:

- If your child has any problem breathing, is very sleepy, refuses food and water, or other health concerns, reduce his/her exposure to smoke and seek medical help right away.
- If your child has asthma, allergies, or a chronic health condition, he/she is at high risk from health effects related to wildfire smoke and ash. Seek medical advice as needed. For children with asthma, follow the asthma action plan.
- Do not rely on masks for protection from smoke. Paint, dust and surgical masks, even N95 masks, are not made to fit children and will not protect children from breathing wildfire smoke. Humidifiers or breathing through a wet washcloth do not prevent breathing in smoke.

Evacuation

- Seek shelter in another place (e.g., public air shelter) if your family does not have an air conditioner OR air cleaner OR if it is too warm

in your home to stay inside with the windows closed. Plan to take the quickest route to the shelter to limit exposure to smoke.

- Bring all medication (taken by each family member) with you.
- Reduce smoke in your vehicle by closing the windows and vents and operating the air conditioning with the fresh intake closed to keep outdoor smoke from getting into car. Never leave children in a car or truck alone.

After a Wildfire

- Make sure ash and debris have been removed before bringing your child back to home or school.
- Children should not be doing any cleanup work. Fires may deposit large amounts of ash and dust with harmful chemicals. Avoid bringing polluted ash and dust back to areas used by children (such as a home or car). Remove shoes at the doorway, wash clothing separately, and change out of clothing before you have contact with your children.

For more information:

Learn more about wildfire smoke: *Wildfire Smoke, A Guide for Public Health Officials:*

https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/wildfire_may2016.pdf

Get air quality information: Check the airnow.gov website, or your state air quality agency's website.

Air Quality Flag Program: This visual tool alerts schools and organizations and their communities to the local air quality forecast. <https://airnow.gov/flag>

Learn about home air cleaners: <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/guide-air-cleaners-home>

Find certified air cleaning devices: <http://www.arb.ca.gov/research/indoor/aircleaners/certified.htm>

Contact Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 for emergency concerns regarding ingestion or exposure to hazards.

Contact your Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit with children's environmental health questions: www.pehsu.net

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This factsheet is dedicated in memory of Dr. James M. Seltzer as well as the first responders and others who have been affected by wildfires.

APPENDIX A

Air Quality Guide for Particle Pollution

Harmful particle pollution is one of our nation's most common air pollutants. Use the chart below to help reduce your exposure and protect your health. For your local air quality forecast, visit www.airnow.gov

Air Quality Index	Who Needs to be Concerned?	What Should I Do?
Good (0-50)		It's a great day to be active outside.
Moderate (51-100)	Some people who may be unusually sensitive to particle pollution.	<p>Unusually sensitive people: Consider reducing prolonged or heavy exertion. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. These are signs to take it easier.</p> <p>Everyone else: It's a good day to be active outside.</p>
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (101-150)	Sensitive groups include people with heart or lung disease, older adults, children and teenagers.	<p>Sensitive groups: Reduce prolonged or heavy exertion. It's OK to be active outside, but take more breaks and do less intense activities. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath.</p> <p>People with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and keep quick relief medicine handy.</p> <p>If you have heart disease: Symptoms such as palpitations, shortness of breath, or unusual fatigue may indicate a serious problem. If you have any of these, contact your health care provider.</p>
Unhealthy (151-200)	Everyone	<p>Sensitive groups: Avoid prolonged or heavy exertion. Consider moving activities indoors or rescheduling.</p> <p>Everyone else: Reduce prolonged or heavy exertion. Take more breaks during outdoor activities.</p>
Very Unhealthy (201-300)	Everyone	<p>Sensitive groups: Avoid all physical activity outdoors. Move activities indoors or reschedule to a time when air quality is better.</p> <p>Everyone else: Avoid prolonged or heavy exertion. Consider moving activities indoors or rescheduling to a time when air quality is better.</p>
Hazardous (301-500)	Everyone	<p>Everyone: Avoid all physical activity outdoors.</p> <p>Sensitive groups: Remain indoors and keep activity levels low. Follow tips for keeping particle levels low indoors.</p>

Key Facts to Know About Particle Pollution:

- Particle pollution can cause serious health problems – including asthma attacks, heart attacks, strokes and early death.
- Particle pollution can be a problem at any time of the year, depending on where you live.
- You can reduce your exposure to pollution and still get exercise! Use daily Air Quality Index (AQI) forecasts at www.airnow.gov to plan your activity.

What is particle pollution?

Particle pollution comes from many different sources. Fine particles (2.5 micrometers in diameter and smaller) come from power plants, industrial processes, vehicle tailpipes, woodstoves, and wildfires. Coarse particles (between 2.5 and 10 micrometers) come from crushing and grinding operations, road dust, and some agricultural operations.

Why is particle pollution a problem?

Particle pollution is linked to a number of health problems, including coughing, wheezing, reduced lung function, asthma attacks, heart attacks and strokes. It also is linked to early death.

Do I need to be concerned?

While it's always smart to pay attention to air quality where you live, **some people may be at greater risk from particle pollution.** They include:

- People with cardiovascular disease (diseases of the heart and blood vessels)
- People with lung disease, including asthma and COPD
- Children and teenagers
- Older adults
- Research indicates that obesity or diabetes may increase risk.
- New or expectant mothers may also want to take precautions to protect the health of their babies.

How can I protect myself?

Use AQI forecasts to plan outdoor activities. On days when the AQI forecast is unhealthy, take simple steps to reduce your exposure:

- Choose a less-strenuous activity
- Shorten your outdoor activities
- Reschedule activities
- Spend less time near busy roads

When particle levels are high outdoors, they can be high indoors – unless the building has a good filtration system.

Keep particles lower indoors:

- Eliminate tobacco smoke
- Reduce your use of wood stoves and fireplaces
- Use HEPA air filters and air cleaners designed to reduce particles
- Don't burn candles

Can I help reduce particle pollution?

Yes! Here are a few tips.

- Drive less: carpool, use public transportation, bike or walk
- Choose ENERGY STAR appliances
- Set thermostats higher in summer and lower in winter
- Don't burn leaves, garbage, plastic or rubber
- Keep car, boat and other engines tuned

