



PUBLIC HEALTH

ALWAYS WORKING FOR A SAFER AND
HEALTHIER COMMUNITY

Chelan-Douglas Health District

200 Valley Mall Parkway, East Wenatchee, WA 98802

Personal Health: 509/886-6400 • FAX 886-6478

Environmental Health: 509/886-6450 • FAX 886-6499

Fires, Air Quality, and Your Health

- Wildfire smoke exposure in communities is not known to cause any long-term increase in health risks for otherwise healthy people. (That is not true of all smoke – tobacco smoke, for example, is quite dangerous.)
- Most otherwise healthy people are able to minimize their exposure when possible (for example, don't go running when it is smoky) but can go about their daily lives without significant health effects.
- But of course smoke exposure is not good for anyone. At the very least it is irritating. But if you have breathing or heart problems, you should take it seriously. Be sure to see your doctor if you find that your health problems get worse from the smoke.

What health problems can smoke cause?

- Eye, nose, and throat irritation (burning eyes and runny nose).
- Wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, and headaches.
- Aggravation of existing lung, heart and circulatory conditions, including asthma and angina.

Who is especially sensitive to smoke?

Inhaling smoke is not good for anyone, even healthy people. People most likely to have health problems from breathing smoke include:

- People with lung diseases such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), including bronchitis and emphysema.
- People with respiratory infections, such as cold or flu.
- People with existing heart or circulatory problems, such as congestive heart failure, coronary artery disease, and angina.
- People with a prior history of heart attack or stroke.
- Infants and children because their lungs and airways are still developing and they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults.
- Older adults over age 65. Adults age 65 and older may have unrecognized heart or lung disease.
- Smokers already have lower lung function or lung disease, and breathing smoke can make their conditions worse.
- Diabetics.

How can I protect myself and my family from outdoor smoke?

- Check local air quality reports and listen to news or health warnings for your community.
- Avoid physical exertion.
- Stay indoors and keep indoor air as clean as possible. Take the following steps when indoors:
 - Keep windows and doors closed. If there is no air conditioning and it is too hot to keep windows and doors closed, consider leaving the area.
 - Run an air conditioner (if you have one), set it to re-circulate and close the fresh-air intake. Make sure to change the filter regularly.
 - Use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to reduce indoor air pollution.
 - Don't add indoor pollution. Don't use candles, fireplaces, or gas stoves. Don't vacuum, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home. Don't smoke, because smoking puts even more pollution into the air.
 - Some room air cleaners can help remove smoke particles indoors. More information on air cleaners is available at: www.arb.ca.gov/research/indoor/acdsumm.pdf.
- If you must be outdoors during smoke events, wear an N-95 respirator mask.
- If you have asthma or other lung diseases, make sure you follow your doctor's directions about taking your medicines and follow your asthma management plan. Call your health care provider if your symptoms worsen.

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