

Health information, advice, and services to protect people from wildfires



early information on wildfire hazards, including weather forecasts;

air quality monitoring reports;



information about the health impacts and ways people can protect themselves;



information on help lines, social services, ambulances, clean-air and cooling-down spaces, transport and emergency medical services;



local hospital services for treatment of medical emergencies and acute effects;

primary care services and outpatient services to care for affected people in the community;



facilities for oxygenation and respirators for particularly vulnerable populations;

public spaces to serve as clean-air and cooling-down shelters.

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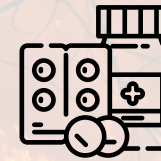
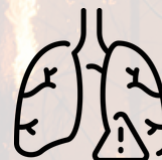
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Protecting your health during wildfires



World Health
Organization

European Region

What risks do wildfires pose to my health?

The health effects of smoke from wildfires can range from eye and respiratory tract irritation to more serious disorders, including reduced lung function, bronchitis, exacerbated asthma and premature death.



Smoke from wildfires can also contribute to higher exposures to air pollution at longer distances with more long-term effects: particulate matter is capable of penetrating deep into lung passageways and entering the bloodstream, primarily resulting in cardiovascular and respiratory impacts.



Children, elderly people, those with pre-existing cardiovascular or respiratory conditions and pregnant women are at greatest risk.

How can I protect my health during wildfires?



If there are wildfires in your area, the following actions can help you prevent or minimize direct health consequences.



Follow official updates and advice from your local authorities, including alerts on air pollution and recommendations on protective measures. Keep abreast of any instructions to relocate or evacuate.

When wildfires are near or air pollution from smoke is high, stay indoors as much as possible with the doors and windows shut, unless you have been advised to evacuate. This is particularly important for those who are most at risk from the effects of smoke: children and older people, and individuals with chronic conditions.



Wear a well-fitting mask (an FFP2 or N95 mask) if you need to move outside. In hot conditions, pace any outdoor activity and take breaks, since mask use adds physiological strain during exertion in heat.

Reduce unnecessary travel. If travel is essential, motor vehicle drivers should use their headlights during the daytime to make their vehicle more conspicuous and improve visibility. Optimize and maintain vehicle filtration/ventilation systems and drive with the windows closed and the air conditioning set to recirculate air.





If wildfire smoke is present during a simultaneous heat wave, only use fans to circulate air already inside the home — not fans that draw in air from outside — and if using air conditioning, set it to recirculation mode and avoid direct ventilation with outside air. Close windows and shutters (if available). Move to the coolest room in the home, especially at night.

Reduce other sources of indoor air pollution – such as smoking cigarettes, using propane gas or wood-burning stoves, spraying aerosol products and frying or grilling food – to partly compensate for increased particle loading from the outdoor air.



Pay attention to any health symptoms, particularly if you have respiratory or cardiovascular diseases or are pregnant.

Get medical help if you have any symptoms.



What can I do if I or someone else gets burned or is caught up in a wildfire?

Call for emergency help: only provide first aid to others if it is safe to do so. Move to a safer place, away from wildfires as soon as possible.



Remove any clothing that has caught alight.

Extinguish flames by allowing the person to roll on the ground, by applying a blanket, or by using flame-extinguishing liquids. Avoid using water, as it can cause burns due to steam.



If burns are minor, keep the burned area in contact with cool running water for 20–30 minutes.

If burns are severe, do not attempt to remove clothing stuck to the burn. Cover the person with a clean, dry cloth or blanket to reduce heat loss and help prevent shock.



Do not apply ice, pastes or oils to the burned area.

When should I seek medical assistance?

Seek medical assistance if you:



- have been burned;



- experience severe respiratory distress, chest pain, or other concerning symptoms due to smoke exposure;



- have a chronic disease and need your medication;

- experience symptoms such as burning eyes, difficulty breathing or skin irritation; or



- feel stressed and aggressive, have recurrent dreams of fires and are worried about returning wildfires.

If you need to access a hospital:



- check official information to find out which hospitals are operative;
- keep in mind that those with serious burns and urgent needs will be prioritized; and
- let health-care workers know if you have any chronic medical conditions.

How can I support people at greater risk?

Pay attention to the needs of vulnerable people such as older people, children, pregnant women and persons with chronic health conditions. Offer assistance or help them access resources if needed.



For vulnerable people, it is beneficial to stay in buildings that are better protected from or further away from smoke sources and in cooler environments. There may be schools, child-care centres, retirement homes, nursing homes, hospitals and hospices that can provide air-conditioned rooms for susceptible individuals.

How can I stay informed after a wildfire?

During emergencies, too much information, including false or misleading information, can make people feel unsure about what they need to do to protect themselves and those around them.



- Get information, advice and guidance from official sources, such as your national and local health authority.
- Always check the source and analyse the content before sharing it with others.