

Bushfire—staying safe and healthy in smoky conditions

Knowing how to keep yourself safe and healthy in smoky conditions is critical during a bushfire. Smoke from bushfires can affect your health and may, in some instances, be fatal. Bushfire smoke contains toxic gases such as carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides, and particles, all of which can be hazardous to your health.

Who is at risk

How smoke affects you depends on your age, pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma or heart disease, the level of smoke in the air and the length of time you are exposed to the smoke. Signs of smoke irritation include itchy eyes, sore throat, runny nose and coughing.

Healthy adults usually find that after a short exposure to smoke these symptoms can clear up once the smoke goes away or they move away to a smoke free area.

However, children, the elderly, people who smoke and people with heart or lung conditions (including asthma) are more sensitive to the effects of breathing in bushfire smoke. Symptoms may worsen and include wheezing, chest tightness and difficulty breathing.

How to protect yourself in smoky conditions

To protect your health from smoke during a bushfire:

- minimise your physical activity outdoors. People with pre-existing lung or heart conditions, in particular, should rest as much as possible and keep away from the smoke
- when indoors, keep the windows and doors closed. If you have an air conditioner, turn it on and switch it to 'recycle or re-circulate'
- if your home gets too hot for comfort or is letting in a lot of smoky air, try to visit an air-conditioned community library or shopping centre (if it is safe to do so)
- when indoors, avoid other sources of air pollution including smoke from cigarettes and woodstoves
- if there is a break in smoky conditions, take the opportunity to ventilate your home to improve indoor air quality
- anyone with a lung or heart condition should keep at least seven days worth of medication on hand. Those with asthma should follow their personal asthma treatment plan
- anyone experiencing breathing problems or chest pain should seek medical advice immediately

- listen to your local radio station or watch your television for updates on fire and smoke conditions in the area
- individuals who are particularly sensitive to smoky conditions should consider temporarily moving away from the smoke-affected area and staying with a friend or relative.



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Use of dust masks

Special face masks (called P2 masks) filter bushfire smoke, providing greater protection against inhaling fine particles. They are available at most hardware stores. However, before deciding to wear a mask please consider:

- they can be hot and uncomfortable to wear
- they can make it harder to breathe normally
- anyone with a pre-existing heart or lung condition should seek medical advice before use
- if the seal around the face and mouth is poor the mask is much less effective
- the masks do not filter out toxic gases such as carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides.



Further information:

- Queensland Health
www.health.qld.gov.au/disaster
- Queensland Fire and Rescue Services
www.fire.qld.gov.au/communitiesafety/
- Emergency Management Queensland
www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp
- Department of Environment and Natural Resources
www.derm.qld.gov.au/
- Red Cross
www.redcross.org.au/emergency-services.aspx
- 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
- Contact your doctor, hospital or health clinic
- Contact your nearest Queensland Health public health unit.

Queensland Health public health units:

Brisbane North Tel: 3624 1111
Brisbane South Tel: 3000 9148
Bundaberg Tel: 4150 2780
Cairns Tel: 4226 5555
Central Queensland Tel: 4920 6989
Central West Tel: 4652 6000

Darling Downs Tel: 4631 9888
Gold Coast Tel: 5668 3700
Hervey Bay Tel: 4184 1800
Logan Tel: 3412 2989
Mackay Tel: 4911 0400
Moreton Bay Tel: 3142 1800

Mount Isa and Gulf Tel: 4744 9100
South West Tel: 4656 8100
Sunshine Coast Tel: 5409 6600
Townsville Tel: 4753 9000
West Moreton Tel: 3413 1200