



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

2017 Wildfire Smoke Health Information

Smoke and wildfires can be a serious health hazard for communities across the province. The FNHA would like to provide some health information tips for those who may find themselves in close proximity to wildfires.

If you are in an emergency dial 9-1-1 or a local emergency contact number immediately.

For non-emergency health information and services visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call 8-1-1 toll-free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can also contact your community health nurse or environmental health officer.

Find your local EHO here: www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/environmental-health
For the Air Quality Index for your area, visit www.bcairquality.ca/readings/

Smoke conditions and local air pollution levels can change due to the unpredictable nature of wildfires. Health effects from smoke, such as irritated eyes, nose and throat irritation, and/or coughing or difficulty breathing, is common in healthy people. These effects may be more serious to people who are considered sensitive populations.

SENSITIVE POPULATIONS

Some people are considered to be more sensitive to smoke. These include people with existing heart or lung conditions, infants and young children, the Elderly, pregnant women, or those requiring special care and supportive care.

THIS POPULATION SHOULD:

- Take actions to reduce exposure at an early stage – refer to the recommendations below.
- Watch for any change in symptoms that may be due to smoke exposure such as: persistent cough or wheezing, shortness of breath or other symptoms that indicate worsening of the underlying chronic health condition.
- Residents with asthma or other chronic illness should activate their asthma or personal care plan.
- If you have severe symptoms from smoke exposure, go to the health centre or nursing station.

Individuals whose health is being affected by prolonged smoke in their community and who don't have local access to a community clean air shelter, may want to consider temporarily relocating to friends or family in a larger community that does have daily access to clean air shelters such as gyms, shopping malls or extended family members homes with HEPA filters.

If you are otherwise healthy but experiencing symptoms due to heavy smoke follow the steps below to reduce your exposure.

REDUCING EXPOSURE TO SMOKE

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO REDUCE HEALTH EFFECTS OF SMOKE IN THE AIR:

- Use common sense regarding outdoor physical activity – if your breathing becomes difficult or uncomfortable, stop or reduce the activity, or go inside. If outdoor trips in smoky areas are necessary, breathe through a damp cloth to help filter out particles.
- Staying indoors may help you stay cool and provide some relief from the smoke. Close windows and blinds and move to the coolest room in the house. Also, keep the body cool and hydrated: take cool showers or baths and drink plenty of fluids - avoid drinks with sugar or alcohol.
- Keep particle levels inside lower by not using anything that burns, such as wood stoves or even candles. Don't smoke – this puts even more stress on your lungs.
- Use a portable HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filtration unit or electrostatic precipitator if available. Buildings with central air systems may also provide relief.
- When driving your car, keep your windows and vents closed. Air conditioning should only be operated in the “recirculate” setting.”

More information can be found at:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/health-your-environment/air-quality>

