



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

How to Prepare for the Wildfire Smoke Season

Information via BC Lung Association

Wildfires and smoke are a normal part of summer in British Columbia, but our seasons seem to be getting longer and more extreme. We cannot accurately predict when big wildfires will occur, and we cannot eliminate smoke pollution, so the best approach is to prepare for a smoky summer before the wildfire season begins.

Reducing exposure to wildfire smoke is the best way to protect your health.

- Most people spend more than 80% of their time indoors, so clean indoor air is important.
- Purchase a high quality portable air cleaner that uses HEPA filtration to remove smoke from the indoor air. Different units treat different volumes of air, so do your research to get something suitable for your space. Electrostatic precipitators can also be effective, but they produce trace amounts of ozone that might irritate sensitive lungs.
- If you have forced air heating and/or air conditioning, talk to your service provider about what filters and settings to use during smoky conditions.
- Know where to find cleaner air in your community. Libraries, community centres, and shopping malls often have cooler, filtered air that can provide a respite from outdoor smoke.
- Understand that the harder you breathe, the more smoke you inhale. Plan to take it easy, keep your respiration rate low, and drink plenty of water if it gets smoky.

Be aware of people who should take extra care, including anyone with chronic conditions such as asthma, heart disease, or diabetes, as well as pregnant women, infants, young children, and the elderly.

- If you or members of your family have a chronic disease, work with your doctor to create a management plan for smoky periods.
- If you use rescue medications of any kind, ensure that you have an adequate supply at home and start carrying them at times when you hear about fires in the news. Have a clear plan to follow if your rescue medications cannot bring your condition under control.
- If you are going to be pregnant or caring for an infant through the summer months, make a plan for minimizing smoke exposures if they occur.

Some people have to be outside during smoky conditions, but there are still ways to reduce smoke exposure and its health impacts.

- If you are an outdoor worker, use resources from [WorkSafe BC](#). Talk to your occupational health and safety specialists about what type of respirator you need before the season starts. You must be professionally fitted in advance for any respirator to be used in smoky conditions.
- If you care for groups of children or plan outdoor events, ensure that your organization establishes a smoke plan before the wildfire season begins so that you can make clear and transparent decisions if air quality becomes a concern.