



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Information on Wildfire Smoke and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Air quality has deteriorated throughout BC recently as a result of wildfires in Washington, Oregon and California. The air quality health index (<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/bcairquality/data/aqhi-table.html>) is currently “high” or “very high” risk for much of BC, with the worst air quality closest to the U.S. border.

Reducing your exposure to wildfire smoke is the best way to protect your health. When the skies are smoky, stay indoors as much as possible, avoid exercising outdoors, and avoid doing activities that may cause further indoor or outdoor air pollution. N95 masks should be reserved for health care professionals during the pandemic, and not be a primary means of reducing smoke exposure.

The FNHA recommends First Nations communities create cleaner air spaces, where individuals can find relief from wildfire smoke. FNHA Environmental Health Officers can support First Nations communities in identifying these spaces, which may already exist in your community. If you are at high risk and are unable to access a community cleaner air space due to mobility or access issues, the FNHA can support with procurement of HEPA (“High Efficiency Particulate Air”) filters or provide information on how to build your own air cleaner. Contact your Environmental Health Officer for more information: environmental.health@fnha.ca

About Wildfire Smoke

Wildfire smoke is a mixture of chemicals and pollutants that is harmful to human health. Smoke can cause coughing, and eye and lung irritation and inflammation. It can also reduce your ability to fight off respiratory infections. Individuals exposed to wildfire smoke may be more susceptible to COVID-19 and may have more severe cases of COVID-19 if they become infected.

Individuals with higher health risks related to wildfire smoke include those who have existing conditions such as asthma, COPD, or other lung or respiratory diseases (including COVID-19); pregnant women; and those who are immunocompromised.

Disasters like wildfires and the current pandemic affect individuals in many ways, including strains on our emotional and mental wellness. During this challenging time, remember to



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check in with yourself and your loved ones, especially Elders, children and those who may be more at risk.

Additional resources:

- BCCDC wildfire smoke and COVID-19: http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID19_WildfireSmoke.pdf
- Wildfire Information from the FNHA: <https://www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/environmental-health/wildfire-information>
- Wildfire Smoke Health Information from the FNHA: <https://www.fnha.ca/about/news-and-events/news/wildfire-smoke-health-information>
- FNHA Information on Air Purifier Distribution:
- FireWork forecast for BC: https://weather.gc.ca/firework/firework_anim_e.html?type=em&utc=12®ion=pacific
- BCCDC resources related to smoke and health: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/prevention-public-health/wildfire-smoke>
- Information on DIY Air Filters:
 - <https://pscleanair.gov/525/DIY-Air-Filter>
 - <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5760488227d4bd87de902e88/t/5d30945dc7c3510001027ea4/1563464798578/Box+Fan+Filter%2C+A+DIY+Users+Guide%2C+Colville+Tribes+Air+Quality+Program.pdf>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukyF2xm8cws&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR31COEGOWCFIS6Yg-XkEcwDHFarXaXS9nv22HkOX2WUBcDbujUoLQzCMaM>
- COVID-specific information here:
 - <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks/wildfires>
 - http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/Wildfire_Smoke_Care_Facilities.pdf