WILDFIRE SMOKE FACTSHEET



Protect Your Lungs from Wildfire Smoke or Ash

Wildfire smoke and ash can irritate your eyes, nose, throat, and lungs. They can make you cough or wheeze, and can make it hard to breathe. A respirator is a device (mask) that covers your nose and mouth, fits tightly to your face, and can filter out smoke or ash particles before you breathe them in. Respirators are not sized for children.

Protecting Your Health

The most effective way to protect yourself during wildfire emergencies is to stay indoors or limit your time outdoors when there is smoke in the air. This is especially important if you have heart or lung disease and are at higher risk for adverse health effects. Reducing physical activity and using HEPA-filtered air cleaners indoors are other ways to reduce your smoke exposure. Consider temporary relocation out of the smoky area if possible. By limiting your exposure one of these ways, you may not need to wear a respirator.

Respirators Can Help Protect Your Lungs



N95 or P100 respirators can help protect your lungs from smoke or ash. Straps must go above and below the ears.

How Do I Know if I Need to Wear a Respirator?

- People who stay indoors or limit their time outdoors during wildfire emergencies are doing the most effective thing to avoid exposure and may not need to wear a respirator.
- People who must be outside for extended periods of time in smoky air or an ash-covered area may benefit from using a tight-fitting N95 or P100 respirator to reduce their exposure.
- People experiencing health effects from a smoky environment, even if indoors, may also benefit from using a tight-fitting respirator to reduce their exposure.
- For people who want to wear a respirator, learning how to select and correctly use the respirator is important for achieving the most protection possible.

Choose the Correct Respirator

- Respirators are sold at many hardware and home repair stores and pharmacies.
- Choose a "particulate respirator" that has been tested and approved by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). It will have the words **"NIOSH" and either "N95" or "P100"** printed on it.
- Choose a respirator that has two (2) straps to go around your head.
- Choose a size that will fit over your nose and under your chin and seal tightly to your face. Any leakage around the edge of the mask causes unfiltered air to enter and be inhaled.
- Do NOT choose a mask with only one strap or two straps that go around your ears. They are not designed to seal tightly to the face and will not protect your lungs.

How to Use this Type of Respirator

- To get a secure fit, place the respirator over your nose and under your chin, with one strap placed below the ears and one strap above the ears (see photo on page 1).
- Pinch the metal part of the respirator (if there is one) over the top of your nose so it fits securely.
- Follow instructions on the package about how to check for a tight face seal.
- Make sure the skin is clean shaven where the respirator touches the face. A good seal is not possible with facial hair.
- Throw away your respirator when it gets harder to breathe through, or if it gets dirty.

Possible Risks

- Wearing a respirator can make it harder to breathe. If you have heart or lung problems, ask your doctor before using a respirator.
- If you have difficulty breathing, get dizzy, or have other symptoms while wearing a respirator, go to a place with cleaner air and remove it.
- Wearing a respirator, especially if it's hot or you are physically active, can increase the risk of heat-related illness. Take breaks often and drink water.
- Respirators do not come in sizes suitable for children. Since they would not fit well enough to provide a tight face seal, they would not be effective at reducing exposure.

For more information:

- To learn more about protecting yourself from wildfire smoke, contact your local or state health department or go to www.airnow.gov
- To learn more about respirators, visit: https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npptl/topics/respirators/disp_part/default.html
- Infographic about respirators: https://airnow.gov/static/topics/images/epa-infographic-respirator.jpg
- How to put on and remove your respirator: https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-133/pdfs/2010-133.pdf

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