

# Wildfire smoke and health

Information kit for partners and stakeholders



Health Canada Santé Canada

Canada

# Introduction

Canada is warming faster than the global rate, providing ideal conditions for more frequent and longer wildfire smoke events. In Canada, wildfire season typically runs from early April to late October.

Wildfire smoke may be carried hundreds or thousands of kilometres from the fire zone. This means smoke from other parts of the world can impact communities in Canada.

The best way to protect your health is to reduce your exposure to wildfire smoke.

Health Canada has created this resource kit of information about wildfire smoke that you can use and share with your own audiences.

## Useful Links

- Useful websites:
  - [Wildfire smoke, air quality and your health](#)
  - [Air Quality Health Index \(AQHI\)](#)
- Factsheets and infographics on wildfire smoke, air quality and your health:
  - [Wildfire smoke 101: Wildfire smoke and your health](#)
  - [Wildfire smoke 101: How to prepare for wildfire smoke](#)
  - [Wildfire smoke 101: Combined wildfire smoke and heat](#)
  - [Wildfire smoke 101: Using an air purifier to filter wildfire smoke](#)
  - [Infographic: Protecting your indoor air from outdoor pollutants](#)
- Videos:
  - [Wildfire smoke – Protect your health](#)
  - [Understanding the Air Quality Health Index](#)
- For provinces, territories and municipalities interested in creating or managing local Cleaner Air Spaces, advice, and a simple checklist can be found here:
  - [Guidance for Cleaner Air Spaces during Wildfire Smoke Events](#)

## Social Media Sharing

You can make use of the following ready-to-use Government of Canada posts for Twitter and Facebook or adapt them for your audience. Here are a few tips to give your posts more impact:

- Social media posts generate more interest when there's a strong visual element to them. Graphics sized to each social media platform have been included in this document for your use.
- When posting on Twitter you can tag [@GovCanHealth](#) in English posts and [@GouvCanSante](#) in French posts.

## Suggested Tweet

With the ongoing wildfires in Canada, it is important to know how to protect ourselves to limit our exposure to the wildfire smoke. Download the WeatherCAN app to get special air quality statements and see the Air Quality Health Index for your area.

## Suggested Facebook Post

We are experiencing one of the worst wildfires seasons in Canada so far. It is important to know what you can do to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Limit your exposure to harmful wildfire smoke by:

- Using the WeatherCAN app to see special air quality statements and the Air Quality Health Index to identify your level of risk.
- Limiting outdoor activity when the air quality is affected by smoke.
- Protecting your indoor air quality by keeping your windows and doors closed and using a good quality air filter in your ventilation system or using a portable air purifier. Turn on your air conditioning, if possible, when temperatures are high.
- If you must spend time outdoors, consider wearing a well-fitted respirator type mask, such as a NIOSH certified N95 or equivalent respirator.



You can find more shareable Government of Canada social media content related to wildfires here : <https://trello.com/b/Sv9GI3Hg/wildfires>

## Share our Social Media Posts

We are actively promoting information about wildfire smoke on our social media channels and encourage you to retweet and share our posts.

- Twitter – English: [@GovCanHealth](https://twitter.com/GovCanHealth) | French: [@GouvCanSante](https://twitter.com/GouvCanSante)
- Facebook – English: [@HealthyCdns](https://www.facebook.com/HealthyCdns) | French: [@CANenSante](https://www.facebook.com/CANenSante)
- LinkedIn – [Health Canada](https://www.linkedin.com/company/HealthCanada) | [Santé Canada](https://www.linkedin.com/company/SanteCanada)

# Wildfire smoke and your health: Key messages

Milder and more common symptoms of smoke exposure include:

- headaches
- a mild cough
- a runny nose
- production of phlegm
- eye, nose and throat irritation

These symptoms can typically be managed without medical intervention.

More serious symptoms include:

- dizziness
- chest pains
- severe cough
- shortness of breath
- wheezing (including asthma attacks)
- heart palpitations (irregular heart beat)

If you have any of these symptoms, talk to a health care provider or seek urgent medical attention. Less commonly, exposure to wildfire smoke can lead to heart attack, stroke and even premature death. If you think you are having a medical emergency, dial 911 and seek immediate medical assistance.

Some populations are more vulnerable to the health effects of air pollutants in wildfire smoke, including:

- seniors
- pregnant people
- infants and young children
- people who smoke
- people who work or spend a significant amount of time outdoors
- people involved in strenuous outdoor exercise
- people with existing illnesses or chronic health conditions, such as:
  - cancer
  - heart or lung conditions
  - diabetes

It is important to listen to your body and reduce or stop activities if you are experiencing symptoms.

At-risk individuals should:

- have a plan with their doctor to have a supply of required medications in their home in case of a wildfire smoke event.
- consider reducing or rescheduling strenuous outdoor activities when the Air Quality Health Index is moderate (4-6)
- reduce or reschedule strenuous outdoor activities when the AQHI is high (7-10)
- avoid strenuous outdoor activities when the AQHI is very high (10+)

# The best way to protect your health is to reduce your exposure to wildfire smoke.

Pay attention to the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI), special air quality statements or other indicators of smoke levels in your community. If necessary, limit outdoor activity and strenuous physical activities. If you have difficulty breathing, stop altogether.

- Find the AQHI and special air quality statements for communities in Canada on the Environment Canada Weather website or the WeatherCAN app.

Stay indoors and keep windows and doors closed. If it is too warm, turn on the air conditioning if possible. If you do not have air conditioning and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek out a local cooling or clean air space.

Use a clean, good quality air filter that your ventilation system can handle based on manufacturers' recommendations.

Use a [portable air purifier](#) to filter particles from wildfire smoke.

Reduce sources of indoor air pollutants and [protect your indoor air](#) from wildfire smoke infiltration.

If you must spend time outdoors, a well-fitted respirator type mask (such as a NIOSH certified N95 or equivalent respirator) that does not allow air to pass through small openings between the mask and face, can help reduce your exposure to the fine particles in smoke. These fine particles generally pose the greatest risk to health. However, respirators do not reduce exposure to the gases in wildfire smoke. It is important to listen to your body and reduce or stop activities if you are experiencing symptoms.

If you need to work outdoors, check with your provincial or territorial occupational health and safety organization or your local health authority. They can provide guidance on how to work safely outdoors during wildfire smoke events.

If you need additional support during a wildfire event, contact your local jurisdiction for information on local cooling or clean air spaces. Community centres, libraries, and shopping malls can also provide a break from the smoke.

Take care of your mental health during a wildfire smoke event. Anyone who is having trouble coping with symptoms of stress, anxiety or depression should seek help from a health professional. These resources are available free of cost to anyone experiencing mental health problems. Don't be afraid to reach out if you need help:

- [Wellness Together Canada](#)
- PocketWell app
- [Kids Help Phone](#)
- [Hope for Wellness Helpline for Indigenous peoples](#)
- [Taking care of your mental health](#)