



Health Threat from Wildfire Smoke

Smoke from wildfires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. Smoke can hurt your eyes, irritate your sinus and respiratory systems, and worsen chronic heart and lung disease. Symptoms include:

- Coughing, scratchy throat
- Irritated sinuses, runny nose, or stinging eyes
- Shortness of breath
- Headaches or fatigue
- Chest pain or Rapid heartbeat
- Shortness of breath

When smoke levels are high enough, even healthy people may experience some of these symptoms.

If you have heart or lung disease, such as congestive heart failure, angina, COPD, emphysema, or asthma, you are at higher risk of having health problems than healthy people. Older adults are more likely to be affected by smoke, as are children because their airways are still developing and they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults. Children also are more likely to be active outdoors.



Protect yourself by limiting your exposure to smoke. Following are ways to protect your health:

1. **Pay attention to local air quality reports.** Watch for news or health warnings about smoke. Find out if your community provides reports about the Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index (AQI). Also pay attention to public health messages about taking additional safety measures.
2. **If you are advised to stay indoors, keep indoor air as clean as possible.** Keep windows and doors closed unless it is extremely hot outside. Run an air conditioner if you have one, but keep the fresh-air intake closed and the filter clean to prevent outdoor smoke from getting inside. If you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere.
3. **Reduce your indoor pollution.** When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns, such as candles, fireplaces, or gas stoves. Do not vacuum, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home. Do not smoke, because smoking puts even more pollution into the air. Use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to reduce breathing problems. A HEPA filter may reduce the number of irritating fine particles in indoor air.
4. **If you have asthma or another lung disease**, follow your doctor's advice about medicines and about your respiratory management plan. Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.
5. **Dust masks are not enough.** Paper "comfort masks" or "dust masks" commonly found at hardware stores are designed to trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke. For more information about effective masks, see the [Respirator Fact Sheet](#) provided by CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.



PERSONAL HAND CARE

Hand washing is your first and best line of defense against food borne illnesses like E. Coli and Salmonella. The Gannett News Service notes that bacteria and viruses causes more than just upset stomachs and fevers. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 325,000 people are hospitalized each year because of food pathogens and 5,000 die as a result.

A quick rinse won't do. A thorough, soapy scrubbing that lasts for at least 20 seconds is best. If soap and water are not available, using a commercially available hand cleaner or waterless instant antiseptic hand cleanser is a good alternative.

KEEP SAFE IN THE SUMMER SUN

Although sunlight is essential for the production of Vitamin D, too much UV light from the sun can be hazardous to your health in two ways: They can cause **skin cancer** over years of unprotected exposure, and **cataracts** in your eyes over time.

To protect yourself from overexposure to UV light, the National Health Museum recommends these precautions:

- ◆ **Wear a hat** and sunglasses if you're going to be out in the sun for a while.
- ◆ **Limit sun exposure** during the hottest part of the day (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.)
- ◆ **Seek shade** whenever possible.
- ◆ **Use sunscreen** with a sun protection factor of at least 15 SPF.
- ◆ **Check the UV Index every day.** You can find reports in local newspapers, on TV, or at the U.S. National Weather Service website: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/>.

Scoping Out Sunglasses

You may think we wear sunglasses for comfort and fashion. But according to Relay Health there's another important reason to wear sunglasses: to protect the health of your eyes.



Spending long hours in the sun without good protection increases your chance of developing problems over the long term that can affect your vision. These problems include cataracts, lumps on the surface of the eye and macular degeneration. Too much sun exposure also can lead to premature wrinkling and dark spots on the skin around the eyes.

What features matter most?

The most important thing is protecting your eyes from the two types of ultraviolet (UV) radiation the sun produces. "Choose sunglasses that protect your eyes from 99 to 100 percent of both UVA and UVB radiation," says ophthalmologist Carol Boerner, M.D., a clinical instructor at Tufts New England Eye Center. "Protect your eyes from blue light with blue-blocking glasses," adds Dr. Boerner. "They decrease glare and may help prevent macular degeneration." Look for labels on sunglasses to make sure they offer these features.

What other features help?

The more light you can keep from your eyes, Dr. Boerner says, the safer and more comfortable you'll be. Wrap-around sunglasses fit closely to block sun from all directions. If your eyes are clearly visible through your lenses, the lenses probably aren't dark enough to provide good protection. For comfort, sunglasses should be free of distortion and imperfection. Look through the glasses at arm's length and move them slowly across, up and down over a square pattern, such as floor tile. If the lines sway or wiggle, the lenses are imperfect. You also should check lenses to ensure the color is exactly the same throughout.



If you play sports, consider getting special impact-resistant lenses made from polycarbonate plastic. Get them with a scratch-resistant coating.