



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONTACT FOR THIS RELEASE:
Krista Dommer, Coordinator
Public Information and Communication
Office phone: (209) 468-3571
Email: kdommer@sjcphs.org

Public Health Recommendations for Wildfire Smoke During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Stockton, CA (August 20, 2020) - Wildfire smoke can irritate your lungs, cause inflammation, affect your immune system, and make you more prone to lung infections, including SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. San Joaquin County Public Health Officer Dr. Maggie Park says, "Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, preparing for and responding to wildfires will have to be different this year. It is vital to know how wildfire smoke will affect you and your loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic and what you can do to protect yourselves." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offer the following guidelines:

Take actions to protect yourself from wildfire smoke during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Stay home and limit your outdoor exercise when it is smoky outside or choose lower-intensity activities to reduce your smoke exposure.
- The best way to protect against the potentially harmful effects of wildfire smoke is to reduce your exposure to wildfire smoke, for example, by seeking cleaner air spaces.
 - Note: Keep in mind that while social distancing guidelines are in place, finding cleaner air might be harder if public facilities such as libraries, community centers, and shopping malls are closed or have limited their capacity.

Create a cleaner air space at home to protect yourself from wildfire smoke during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Use a portable air cleaner in one or more rooms. Portable air cleaners work best when run continuously with doors and windows closed.
- During periods of extreme heat, pay attention to [temperature forecasts](#) and know how to [stay safe in the heat](#).
- Whenever you can, use air conditioners, fans, and window shades to keep your cleaner air space comfortably cool on hot days.
- If you have a forced air system in your home, you may need to speak with a qualified heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) professional about different filters (HEPA or MERV-13 or higher) and settings ("Recirculate" and "On" rather than "Auto") you can use to reduce indoor smoke.
- Avoid activities that create more indoor and outdoor air pollution, such as frying foods, sweeping, vacuuming, and using gas-powered appliances.

Know the difference between symptoms from smoke exposure and COVID-19.

- Some symptoms, like dry cough, sore throat, and difficulty breathing can be caused by both wildfire smoke exposure and COVID-19.
- Symptoms like fever or chills, muscle or body aches, and diarrhea are not related to smoke exposure. Learn more about [symptoms of COVID-19](#).
- Anyone experiencing COVID-19 like symptoms is encouraged to [seek testing](#).
- People who currently have or who are recovering from COVID-19 may be at increased risk of health effects from exposure to wildfire smoke due to compromised heart and/or lung function related to COVID-19.
- If you have [severe symptoms](#), like difficulty breathing or chest pain, seek medical attention immediately, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency facility.

Know whether you are at risk from wildfire smoke during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some people are more at risk of harmful health effects from [wildfire smoke](#) than others are. Those most at risk include:

- Children less than 18 years old
- Adults aged 65 years or older
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic health conditions such as heart or lung disease, asthma, and diabetes
- Outdoor workers
- People who have lower socioeconomic status, individuals experiencing homelessness, or those who have limited access to medical care
- People who are immunocompromised or are taking drugs that suppress the immune system.

Know what to do if you must evacuate.

- Pay attention to local guidance about updated plans for evacuations and shelters, including [potential shelters for your pets](#).
- Whether you decide to evacuate or are asked to evacuate by state or local authorities, [evacuate safely](#).
- When you check on neighbors and friends before evacuating, be sure to follow [social distancing](#) recommendations (staying at least 6 feet from others) and [other CDC recommendations](#) to protect yourself and others.
- If you need to go to a disaster shelter, follow CDC recommendations for staying safe and healthy in a [public disaster shelter](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- If you evacuate to stay with others (family, friends, etc.), masks should be worn around each other, even indoors. Practice physical distancing when possible.
 - Note: Masks that are used to slow the spread of COVID-19 offer little protection against wildfire smoke. They do not catch small, harmful particles in smoke that can harm your health. Although N95 respirators do provide protection from wildfire smoke, they might be in short supply as frontline healthcare workers use them during the pandemic.

Stay informed. Know where to find information about local wildfires, air quality and COVID-19.

- San Joaquin County Office of Emergency Services, <https://SJReady.org>
- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, <http://www.valleyair.org/Home.htm>
- Healthy Air Living, <http://www.healthyairliving.com>
- San Joaquin County Public Health Services, <http://www.sicphs.org>
- California Department of Public Health, <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/>
- Cal Fire, <https://www.fire.ca.gov/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/air/wildfire-smoke/default.htm>.