

BUSHFIRE SMOKE

With all the bushfires, there's a lot of smoke around. What are the health implications of the smoke and what can you do?

Why is Bush Fire Smoke Bad for Your Health?

- Smoke from fires, especially wood fires, is made up of gas and fine, microscopic particles. The microscopic particles are particularly hazardous.

What Problems Can the Particles Cause?

- The particles can irritate your eyes making them water or irritate your throat causing coughing.
- When you breathe in the particles they get lodged in your lungs causing lung conditions like bronchitis or shortness of breath. They can also aggravate chronic heart or lung conditions.

Who is Most at Risk?

- People with heart or lung disease including asthmatics and diabetics
- Older people – over the age of 65 – and young people including teenagers as their lungs are still developing.
- Pregnant women

How do you know if the smoke is affecting you?

- Common symptoms are irritated eyes, runny nose, coughing or wheezing or difficulty breathing.
- People with lung disease may experience coughing, chest discomfort, wheezing, shortness of breath or an inability to breathe deeply or vigorously.
- People with heart disease may experience chest pain, palpitations, shortness of breath or fatigue

What should you do if it's smoky?

- Everybody should limit the time they spend in smoky conditions whenever it's practical to do so.
- If visibility is 1.5km or less, the air quality is at hazardous levels and you need to limit outdoor activities, exercise and follow any treatment plans such as asthma plans.
- Monitor the Air Quality Advice – it's available on Vic Emergency and the EPA website.

What else should you do?

- If you are active outside (including active children) pay attention to symptoms and reduce activity if they get worse.
- Have any medication handy and follow all treatment plans.
- When it's very smoky stay inside. Keep doors and windows closed unless you don't have an air conditioner. Run the air conditioner but make sure the filter is clean.
- Keep particle levels low – don't use fireplaces, BBQs, gas stoves, candles or burn incense. Don't vacuum – it stirs up particles in the house
- Don't smoke!

What about face masks?

- The only face mask that can protect you against bush fire smoke is a P2 mask. You can get them from hardware stores like Bunnings.

When should you see a doctor?

- If you have difficulty breathing, chest tightness, chest pain, loss of balance or dizziness or you do not respond to your treatment plan call an ambulance immediately.