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Fact Sheet

WILDFIRE SMOKE & YOUR HEALTH

What's in smoke from a wildfire?

Smoke is comprised of small particles, gases and water vapor. Water vapor makes up the majority of smoke. The remainder includes carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxide, irritant volatile organic compounds, air toxics and very small particles.

How do I know if I'm being affected?

You may have a scratchy throat, cough, irritated sinuses, headaches, runny nose and stinging eyes. Children and people with lung diseases such as asthma may find it difficult to breathe deeply or vigorously and they may cough or feel short of breath. People with diseases such as asthma or chronic bronchitis may find their symptoms worsening.

Smoke can irritate the eyes and airways, causing coughing, a scratchy throat, irritated sinuses, headaches, stinging eyes or a runny nose. If you have heart or lung disease, smoke might make your symptoms worse. People with heart disease might experience chest pain, palpitations, shortness of breath, or fatigue. People with lung disease may not be able to breathe as deeply or as vigorously as usual, and they may experience symptoms such as coughing, phlegm, chest discomfort, wheezing and shortness of breath. When smoke levels are high enough, even healthy people may experience some of these symptoms.

What can I do to protect myself from wildfire smoke?

- Use common sense. If it's smoky outside, it's probably not a good time to go jogging. And it's probably a good time for your children to remain indoors.
- If you're advised to stay indoors, keep your windows and doors closed. Run your air conditioner if you have one. Keep the fresh air intake closed and the filter clean.
- Help keep particle levels lower indoors by not using anything that burns such as wood stoves, gas stoves, and even candles. And don't smoke. That puts even more pollution in your lungs - and those of the people around you.
- Drink plenty of fluids (not alcohol) to moisten the respiratory tract.
- If you have asthma, be vigilant about taking your medications as prescribed by your doctor. If you're supposed to measure your peak flows, make sure you do so. Call your doctor if symptoms worsen.
- Use of indoor air filtration devices such as HEPA (*High Efficiency Particulate Air*) filters can reduce the number of particles indoors.
- Do not add to 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.

Pay attention to local air quality reports.

Listen and watch for news or health warnings about smoke. A common measurement used to categorize the severity of the smoke in the air is the Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index (AQI). <http://airnow.gov/> Also pay attention to public health messages about taking additional safety measures.

For more information about health and safety during a fire, please visit the Navajo Nation EPA – Air Quality Control Program www.navajonationepa.org/airq or reach us @ (928) 729-4246 / nnepanilchi@navajo.org.