

As fire agencies battle wildfires, there are measures we all can take to protect our health from harmful pollutants in our air. Smoke is a respiratory irritant that can worsen conditions such as asthma, other chronic lung conditions, or heart disease. Pregnant women, children, elderly people, smokers, and people who work or exercise outdoors are at higher risk for complications from smoke exposure.

Here are some tips you can follow to protect you and your family members from unhealthy air:

Stay indoors. Remain indoors, with air conditioning on, as much as possible when air pollution levels are unhealthy. Check the local Air Quality Index (AQI) for this information. Keep the air conditioner filter clean to prevent bringing additional smoke inside. In extremely hot weather, staying inside with the windows closed, without air conditioning may be dangerous. A swamp cooler will not provide protection and will pull in the smoky air from outside. Consider seeking alternative shelters in this situation.

Reduce outdoor activity. If it looks smoky outside, it is not a good time for outdoors exercise and activity for people of any age. People with heart or lung disease should take further measures to avoid prolonged exertion and outdoor exposure. Reducing your physical activity outdoors lowers the amount of unhealthy air your body takes in.

Consult your physician. If you or a family member have heart or lung disease, if you are an older adult, or if you have children, talk with your doctor about whether and when you should leave the area. When smoke is heavy for a prolonged period of time, fine particles can build up indoors, even though you may not be able to see them. If you have asthma or other lung disease, call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.

Have a plan. Be sure to have a family emergency plan and kit with an adequate supply of food, water, medications, and necessities for at least 72 hours in the event that you need to stay home or evacuate.

Keep informed. Visit the local Air Quality Index website (see below) for updates on the air quality and air smoke monitoring. Register for emergency alert texts and emails with the Mariposa County Sheriff.

Use of Respirators - not "Masks". Masks, such as dust, surgical masks or wet bandanas, will not protect your lungs. If the smoke is that irritating to you, the best option is to remain indoors or temporarily relocate. An option is a NIOSH approved disposable respirator, such as an N95. These can be beneficial to reduce particulate inhalation. People with heart or lung conditions should consult their doctor before using a respirator.

Take a break. If you can, take a break by traveling to a smoke-free area away from the wildfire, even if it is just for 3- 4 hours. This can be helpful for both your physical health, and a relief from other stressors.

More Resources:

Mariposa County Air Quality Index Website:
<http://www.mariposacounty.org/index.aspx?NID=1434>

AirNow Website "How Smoke from Fires Can Affect Your Health"
<https://www.airnow.gov/air-quality-and-health/how-smoke-from-fires-can-affect-your-health/>

For more information contact:
Mariposa County Public Health Branch
Mariposa County Health & Human Services Agency
209-966-3689
or Air Pollution Control at 209-966-2220