
Smoke hazard from bushfires

Exposure to smoke from fires can worsen asthma and other respiratory conditions, cause coughing and shortness of breath and irritate the eyes, nose and throat.

Large particles in bushfire smoke irritate the eyes, nose, throat and lungs. The finer particles can penetrate deep into the lungs and are more harmful. Smoke also contains toxic gases, such as carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen oxides.

If you suffer from [asthma](#), heart or lung problems, make sure you always have at least 5 days' worth of medication with you if there is a bushfire nearby.

Other health hazards from bushfires include extreme heat, physical injuries such as burns, [heat stress](#) and dehydration.

Alerts

Health alerts will be broadcast when smoke concentrations are a health risk. They will include information on who is likely to be affected and advice on what to do.

The Department of Parks and Wildlife issues a smoke alert when smoke from prescribed burning or bushfires may affect people in towns and communities, or restrict visibility for motorists. Visit the [Department of Parks and Wildlife \(external site\)](#) for the latest bushfire and smoke alerts.

For the latest fire alerts and warnings, call the Department of Fire and Emergency Services on 1300 657 209 or visit the [Department of Fire and Emergency Services website \(external site\)](#).

Who is at risk?

Those at greatest risk of harm from bushfire smoke are:

- > people with respiratory disease, especially asthma, but also emphysema, chronic bronchitis or allergies
- > smokers
- > people with heart disease
- > children
- > the elderly.

Everyone has a different response to smoke – some people will tolerate a lot of smoke affecting their properties while others will not tolerate even a little smoke. Individuals with underlying health problems will be most sensitive to smoke.

You should listen to your body and if you experience symptoms, try to reduce your exposure to smoke.

Signs and symptoms of smoke exposure

The gases and fine particles produced during a bushfire can make existing respiratory diseases worse, causing:

- > difficulty breathing
- > coughing
- > chest tightness.

People with heart disease may experience:

- > chest pain
- > palpitations
- > difficulty breathing
- > fatigue.

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

Most people recover quickly from smoke exposure, particularly if they are moved to fresh air, and do not suffer long-term health effects.

Reduce your exposure to bushfire smoke

The most important action is to minimise exposure to smoke. To do this:

- > Pay attention to media reports and [DFES alerts \(external site\)](#).
- > Stay inside as much as possible when smoke is thick.
- > When inside, keep windows and doors closed.
- > Use an air conditioner, if you have one, switched to 'recirculate' (or take an air conditioned break in a public building).
- > Avoid adding to the air pollution by not smoking or using candles or wood fires. Do not vacuum or use unflued gas appliances.
- > If you suffer from asthma, heart or lung problems, make sure you always have at least 5 days' worth of medication with you.

Where to get help

If you experience worsening of your asthma that does not respond to usual measures, or you experience new breathing problems or chest pain, get medical help.

- > See your doctor.
- > Visit a [GP after hours](#).
- > Ring *healthdirect Australia* on 1800 022 222.

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See also

- > [After a bushfire - hazards on your property](#)