



New York State **Children's**
Environmental Health Centers



What to do if wildfire smoke is affecting your area

Adapted from [Wildfires: What Parents Need to Know - HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org/About-Health-Policy-and-Advocacy/Wildfires-What-Parents-Need-to-Know/)

Why are children at risk from wildfire smoke?

Smoke from wildfires can spread hundreds of miles from the original source. Children are particularly at risk from exposure to wildfire smoke. This is because they breathe more air relative to their size and are more active than adults. In addition, they are still growing and developing.

What are the health effects?

The health effects of wildfires on a child can include:

- Chest tightness or pain
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- Coughing
- Irritation of the nose, throat, and eyes
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded

How to protect your kids and yourself:

Check on local air quality levels using tools like US EPA's [AirNow.gov](https://www.airnow.gov/) and search by your ZIP code.

If your Air Quality Index (AQI) is 150-200 (unhealthy):

Note: For younger children, or those who are particularly sensitive, these activity recommendations may apply at lower AQI levels. When an air emergency extends beyond a few days, these actions should be considered at lower AQI levels.

Outdoor activity should be minimized and athletic and physical education stopped for all children until air quality improves.

Children with breathing problems, such as asthma, are at increased risk. They should stay in a clean-air environment and be kept indoors until air quality improves. If your child does have asthma, it is important to make sure that you have all their medications including their daily preventative medicines and rescue inhalers available.

Watch for signs or symptoms of harmful health effects, listed above. Children having these symptoms whose usual medications are not helping should be taken to a nearby medical facility.

Stay indoors to minimize smoke exposure, take steps to improve indoor air quality:

- Close all windows, doors, and any other openings.
- Set your air-conditioner to recirculate if possible.
- If you have central air or heating, replace the filter with one rated MERV13 or higher. Whether or not you have central air, consider a High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter or other room air filtration system. NEVER use an air filter that generates ozone.
- When in a car, keep windows closed. Turn the air-conditioning to re-circulate. Replace air filters according to your vehicle maintenance schedule.

Use a face mask when outdoors

Face masks can help protect the lungs. The effectiveness of masks (NIOSH-approved N95, K94, KN95, or medical masks) depend a lot on how well they fit. If well-fitted to the face, a child over age 2 will get more protection from a NIOSH-approved N95 mask than from a medical mask. Humidifiers or breathing through a wet washcloth do not prevent breathing in smoke.

What to do at higher AQI levels:

201-300 (very unhealthy), children should avoid all physical activity outdoors.

301-500 (hazardous), children should avoid going outdoors.

For more information see: [Air Quality guide for Particle Pollution](#)

Resources:

- [Wildfires: What Parents Need to Know - HealthyChildren.org](#)
- [AirNow.gov](#)
- [Masks to Protect Children and Pregnant People from Wildfire Smoke: A Resource for Families](#)
- [Wildfire Smoke Factsheet](#)
- [Children's Health and Wildfires](#)

Recursos en Espanol:

- [Incendios forestales: información para los padres](#)
- [AirNow.gov Recursos](#)
- [Mascarillas para proteger a los niños y personas embarazadas contra el humo de incendio forestal](#)
- [El humo de los incendios forestales y la salud de los niños Recurso para las familias](#)



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