

# Wildfires – Smoke Fact Sheet

June 16, 2008

Not everyone who is exposed to smoke will have health problems. The level and duration of exposure, age, individual vulnerability, including presence or absence of pre-existing lung or heart disease, and other factors play major roles in determine whether or not some one will experience smoke related health problems.

If you are concerned or are experiencing increased symptoms, please contact your healthcare provider.

## What is smoke?

Smoke is a mixture of gases, and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. Smoke can irritate your eyes and respiratory system and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases.

## How can you tell if the smoke is affection you?

Smoke can cause:

- Coughing
- Irritated Sinuses
- Chest pain
- Stinging eyes
- Aggravated asthma symptoms
- A scratchy throat
- Shortness of breath
- Headaches
- A runny nose

## If you have heart or lung disease, smoke might make your symptoms worse

People who have heart disease might experience:

- Chest pain
- Rapid Heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue

Smoke may worsen symptoms for people who have pre-existing respiratory conditions such as, asthma, respiratory allergies and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), in the following ways:

- Inability to breathe normally
- Cough with or with out mucus
- Wheezing and shortness of breath



## **Know whether you are at risk**

**If you have heart or lung disease**, such as congestive heart failure, angina, COPD, emphysema or asthma, you are at a higher risk of having health problems.

**Older adults are more likely to be affected by smoke**, possible because they are more likely to have heart or lung diseases than younger people.

**Children are more likely to be affected by health threats from smoke** because their airways are still developing and because they breathe more air per pound of body weight. Children are also more likely to be active outdoors

**People who smoke**, especially those who have smoked for many years, have already compromised lung function. However, due to adaptation of their lungs to ongoing irritation, smokers are less likely to report symptoms from exposure to irritants, than nonsmokers.

## **Protect yourself**

Limit your exposure to smoke. Following are ways to protect your health:

**Pay attention to local air quality reports.** Listen and watch for news or health warnings about smoke

**If you are advised to stay indoors, keep indoor air as clean as possible.** Keep windows and doors closed.

**Do not add to indoor pollution.** When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns such as candles, fireplaces or gas stoves.

**Follow your doctor’s advice** about medicines and your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease. Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.

## **Get more information**

**Listen and watch local news for information** on air quality and the wildfires.