



Charlie Crist
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Secretary of Health

PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke

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

Smoke can cause:

- Coughing
- A scratchy throat
- Irritated sinuses
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Headaches
- Stinging eyes
- A runny nose
- Asthma exacerbations

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 respiratory allergies, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), in the following ways:**

- Inability to breathe normally
- Cough with or without mucus
- Chest discomfort
- Wheezing and shortness of breath

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

Know whether you are at risk

If you have heart or lung disease, such as congestive heart failure, angina, COPD, emphysema or asthma, you may be at higher risk of having health problems than healthy people.

Older adults are more likely to be affected by smoke, possibly 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 than adults. Children also are more likely to be active outdoors.

Protect yourself

Limit your exposure to smoke. **Here are ways to protect your health:**

- **Pay attention to local air quality reports.** Listen and watch for news or health warnings about smoke. Also pay attention to public health messages about taking additional safety measures.
- **If you are advised to stay indoors, keep indoor air as clean as possible.** Keep windows and doors closed unless it is extremely hot outside. Run an air conditioner if you have one, but keep the fresh-air intake closed and the filter clean to prevent outdoor smoke from getting inside. If you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere.

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- **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.
- **Follow your doctor's advice** about medicines and about your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease, Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.
- **Do not rely on dust masks for protection.** Paper "comfort" or "dust" masks commonly found at hardware stores are designed to trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke. An "N95" mask, *properly worn*, will offer some protection

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The Mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of our community through public and private partnerships in an environment that respects diversity.