



### 1. How can I learn about current air quality?

Nearby wildfires may be affecting your air. Visit [www.baaqmd.gov](http://www.baaqmd.gov) or [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov) for current air quality information. The Air Quality Index (AQI) uses colors to communicate recommended actions (see table). Check often as conditions can change quickly.

### 2. How can I protect my health on smoky days?

- **Stay indoors** with doors and windows closed. Set A/C in home or car to recirculate.
- **Stay hydrated.**
- **Keep cool.** Place damp towels over hands, face and feet, or take a bath and cool with a fan. See our [Heat Pocket Guide](#) for tips. If you can't get cool, go to a [Cooling Center](#). Watch for [signs of heat illness](#), including headache, dizziness or nausea.
- **Limit physical activity outdoors**, like running, biking, physical labor and sports.
- **Keep indoor air clean.** Avoid burning candles, vacuuming, or using the stove, fireplaces, tobacco products or aerosol sprays. Create a “[clean room](#)” with windows and doors closed. Use a portable air cleaner if possible.
- **Visit a [Cleaner Air Center](#) if needed.**
- **Create an [emergency plan](#)** with your household or neighbors. Sign up for [ACAAlert.org](http://ACAAlert.org). Be ready to evacuate.

Air Quality Index Levels of Health Concern	Recommendations
Good (0 to 50)	No health impacts expected
Moderate (51 to 100)	Unusually sensitive people should consider limiting prolonged outdoor exertion
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (101 to 150)	Stay indoors if you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are pregnant</li> <li>• are an infant or young child</li> <li>• are elderly</li> <li>• have asthma or other breathing issues or heart disease</li> <li>• are bothered by smoke</li> </ul>
Unhealthy (151 to 200)	Everyone, especially children, should limit prolonged outdoor activities.
Very Unhealthy (201 to 300)	Everyone, especially children, should limit prolonged outdoor activities.

- If your health condition gets worse, contact your health care provider.

### 3. Can masks and face coverings reduce smoke exposure?

The best way to protect from COVID-19 and poor air quality is to stay indoors. Bandanas, cloth and surgical masks do not protect from smoke, but do protect from COVID-19. Save N95 masks for healthcare workers unless you have no option to be indoors.



Alameda County  
Health Care Services Agency



Alameda County Public Health Department  
Celebrating Healthy People in Healthy Communities

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### Contact

Public Health Department:  
(510) 267-8000 Main Line  
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(510) 268-2101  
[www.acphd.org](http://www.acphd.org)



#### 4. Who is most at risk from wildfire smoke?

Children, older adults and those who are pregnant or have breathing or heart conditions are particularly impacted. These groups should take extra care to avoid polluted air.

#### 5. How can at-risk populations protect themselves further?

Those with breathing or heart conditions should create a plan with their doctor for dealing with smoke.

Keep up to two weeks' worth of medication on hand to avoid going out in smoky air.

Anyone with a cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms that seem linked to smoke should contact their doctor.

Consider leaving the affected area if there is a prolonged heavy smoke event.

#### 6. What are some of the health effects of wildfire smoke?

Smoke contains fine particles that can affect the lungs and heart when inhaled deeply. Smoke can irritate the eyes and airways, causing cough, a dry scratchy throat, runny nose, phlegm, wheezing, and trouble breathing. It may affect the body's ability to remove pollen and bacteria from the lungs. Smoke can aggravate pre-existing heart and lung disease. Elevated particulate matter in the air can trigger wheezing in those who suffer from asthma, emphysema, and COPD.

#### 7. How are symptoms from smoke exposure different from [symptoms of COVID-19](#)?

If you are experiencing symptoms unrelated to smoke exposure such as fever or chills, muscle or body aches, or diarrhea, the CDC COVID-19 [Self-Checker](#) can help determine whether further assessment or testing for COVID-19 is needed. If you experience [severe symptoms](#), such as difficulty breathing or chest pain, call 911.

#### 8. How can I filter air in my home?

Even without filtered air, staying indoors is the best way to reduce smoke exposure. To filter air, consider a portable [HEPA](#) air purifier (make sure it does not produce ozone) or a [MERV 13 or greater filter](#) for your HVAC system.

#### 9. Should I leave my home for cleaner air?

The best way to avoid smoke and COVID-19 exposure is to stay indoors. Follow the suggestions in this FAQ for cleaner indoor air.

Alameda County has created a [Cleaner Air Center resource](#). Go to a cleaner air location if you're unable to seal your home or if smoke occurs during hot weather and you cannot stay home.

If you leave your home, make sure to practice physical distancing, cover your cough, wash your hands frequently, and always wear face coverings to reduce the spread of COVID-19.



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