



### 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) is a color-coded system used to explain what to do at different air quality levels (see table) communicate recommended actions (see table). Conditions can quickly change so check the AQI often.

### 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 keep 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 outdoor exercise when the air is unhealthy.** Or choose lower-intensity activities to reduce smoke exposure
- **Keep indoor air clean.** Avoid burning candles, using the stove, turning on the fireplaces, or using aerosol sprays. Create a "[clean room](#)", a room in the home that is closed off with windows and doors closed. Use a portable air cleaner/purifier 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.

### Can face coverings help reduce smoke exposure?

Cloth and surgical masks provide very little protection against wildfire smoke. Learn more about current [guidance to face coverings](#).

### 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.



Alameda County  
Health Care Services Agency



Alameda County Public Health Department  
Celebrating Healthy People in Healthy Communities

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(510) 267-8000 Main Line

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[www.acphd.org](http://www.acphd.org)



## Who is most at risk from unhealthy air?

Some people are more likely to get sick from unhealthy air, including:

- Children younger than 18 years
- Adults aged 65 year or older
- Pregnant women
- People with chronic health conditions,
- People experiencing homelessness or who work outside

## How can at-risk populations protect themselves?

- People with breathing or heart conditions should create a plan with their doctor for what to do if the air in their area becomes unhealthy
- Keep several weeks worth of medication on hand to avoid going out in unhealthy air
- Anyone with a cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms that seem linked to unhealthy air should contact their doctor.

## What are some of the health effects of wildfire smoke and unhealthy air quality?

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, increased phlegm/mucous, wheezing, and trouble breathing.

Smoke and unhealthy air can make symptoms of aggravate pre-existing heart and lung disease worse. Elevated particulate matter in the air can trigger wheezing in those who suffer from asthma, emphysema, and COPD.

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

Some of the symptoms are the same, such as cough or trouble breathing, and some are different. If you are experiencing symptoms 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.](#)

## 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 (air conditioning) system.

## Where can I go if the air in my home is unhealthy?

If there is unhealthy air in your area for more than a few days, consider leaving the affected area or staying at a clean air center. **Cleaner Air Centers** are facilities such as community centers or libraries that have air filtration systems, where the public may go to access clean air indoors. **Cooling Centers** are facilities that offer a place to cool down during a heat wave.

Some centers may also provide other [resources for people who are experiencing homelessness](#). If you leave your home to visit a Cleaner Air or Cooling Center, please follow current COVID-19 precautions, including wearing a face covering.



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