



Protect Your Lungs From Wildfire Smoke and Ash

Wildfire smoke and ash can irritate your eyes, nose, throat, and lungs. They can make you cough or wheeze and can make it hard to breathe. A respirator is a device (mask) that covers your nose and mouth, fits tightly to your face, and can filter out smoke or ash particles before you breathe them in.

Protecting Your Health

The most effective way to protect yourself during wildfires is to limit your time outdoors when there is smoke in the air. This is especially important if you have heart or lung disease and are at higher risk for adverse health effects. Reducing physical activity and using portable air cleaners indoors are other ways to reduce your smoke exposure. But if you need to go outside, using NIOSH Approved® respirators can help protect your lungs from smoke or ash.

Respirators Can Help Protect Your Lungs

Studies have shown that when worn according to the manufacturer's instructions (including minimizing any gaps between the face and respirator) and used properly, N95® respirators will significantly reduce your exposure to smoke particles.

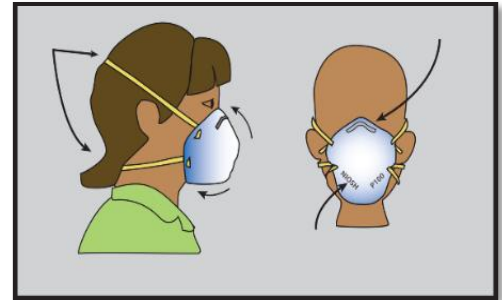
How Do I Know if I Need to Wear a Respirator?

- When you need to be outside for extended periods of time in smoky air or in an ash-covered area you can benefit from using a properly fitting N95® or P100® respirator to reduce your exposure.
- If you experience health effects from smoke, even if indoors and you cannot clean your indoor air, you may also benefit from using a properly fitting respirator to reduce your exposure.

Choose the Correct Respirator

- Respirators are sold at many home improvement stores, hardware stores, pharmacies, and online."
- Choose a "particulate respirator" that has been tested and approved by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and has the words "NIOSH" and either "N95" or "P100" printed on it.
- Choose a respirator that has two (2) straps to go around your head.
- Choose a size that will fit over your nose and under your chin and seal tightly to your face. Check for a tight seal by following the package instructions. If leakage is detected, try another size or model. Leakage around the edge of the mask causes unfiltered air to enter and be inhaled.

- Do NOT choose a mask with only one strap or two straps that go around your ears. They are not designed to seal tightly to the face and will not protect your lungs from smoke.
- Children ages 2 years and older can wear respirators; however, NIOSH Approved respirators do NOT come in sizes suitable for young children. Choose a size that fits over the child's nose and under the chin, does not impair vision, is comfortable, and the child can wear correctly. Monitor your child. If a respirator does not fit properly or is uncomfortable, a child might take it off when it is needed or wear it incorrectly.



Respirators can help protect your lungs from smoke or ash. Straps must go above and below the ears.

When you need to wear a respirator, learning how to select and correctly use the respirator is important for achieving the most protection possible.

How to Use this Type of Respirator

- To get a secure fit, place the respirator over your nose and under your chin, with one strap placed below the ears and one strap above the ears (see above illustration). If the respirator has a nose clip or nosepiece, use two hands to press it firmly to your nose and face.
- Follow the instructions on the package about how to check for a tight face seal each time you put on the respirator or see [DHHS \(NIOSH\) Publication No. 2018-130, *Filtering out Confusion: Frequently Asked Questions about Respiratory Protection, User Seal Check*](#).
- Make sure the skin is clean shaven where the respirator touches the face. A good seal is not possible with facial hair.
- Throw away your respirator when it gets harder to breathe through, or if it gets dirty.

Possible Risks

- Wearing a respirator can make it harder to breathe. If you have heart or lung problems or are pregnant, ask your doctor before using a respirator.
- Wearing a respirator, especially if it's hot or you are physically active, can increase the risk of heat-related illness. Take breaks often and drink water.
- Selecting a respirator with an exhalation valve may help if you find that respirators are uncomfortably hot or difficult to breathe through.
- If you have difficulty breathing, get dizzy, or have other symptoms (e.g., facial discomfort, headaches) while wearing a respirator, go to a place with cleaner air and remove it. If the symptoms do not get better or are severe, get medical attention.

Resources

Scan the QR code to the right to access an online version of this fact sheet and the additional resources below.



Information on Air Quality

Check out the AirNow Fire and Smoke Map, your state air quality website, or your local news for air quality information. Access these resources using the links below!

- [AirNow Fire and Smoke Map](#)
 - [IOS App](#)
 - [Android App](#)
- [Wildfire Guide Fact Sheets](#)
- [Resources and Information on Wildland Fires and Smoke](#)
- [Infographics on Staying Safe Before, During and After Fires](#)
- [EPA's Do-It-Yourself Air Cleaner Infographic](#)

Additional Guidance on Respirators

- [Filtering Out Confusion](#)
- [Respirator Infographics](#)
- [Put On and Take Off Your Respirator Properly](#)

N95® and NIOSH Approved® Certifications

N95® and NIOSH Approved® are certification marks of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) registered in the United States and several international jurisdictions. P100 is a certification mark of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) registered in the United States and several international jurisdictions.



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