



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **STAYING HEALTHY DURING SMOKY CONDITIONS**

*Take Precautions to Protect Your Health from Wildfire Smoke*

STOCKTON, CA (October 11, 2017) - Smoke from wildfires is a complex mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. By fine, the scientists mean particles a fraction of the width of a human hair, so small you likely cannot see them. These particles can cause burning eyes, runny nose, coughing, scratchy throat, irritated sinuses and headaches. Wildfires need not be nearby for these symptoms to occur; with the proper weather conditions we can have smoke from fires far away.

Smoke levels can rise and fall rapidly, depending on weather factors including wind direction. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is monitoring the air quality and has issued a health cautionary statement for the Valley that will be in effect until the fires are extinguished. The District further advises residents that this smoke can be harmful to human health and if you see or smell smoke, you are likely being impacted by it.

“Smoke hanging in the air is not good for anyone, but it can make it especially difficult for at-risk populations to breathe,” said Tammy Evans, Director of San Joaquin County Public Health Services. If you have asthma or other lung disease, contact your health care provider NOW to make sure you have an adequate supply of medication and follow your asthma management plan. Seek care in a timely manner if your symptoms are worsening.

To reduce or eliminate breathing problems or other symptoms, Evans urges ALL residents and visitors to:

### **1. Know if you or a family member is at risk**

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

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## **2. Take precautions to protect your health and that of your family**

- Stay indoors.
- Avoid outdoor activities and any strenuous workouts, even if you are healthy.
- Close windows or doors in your house or car.
- Keep air conditioning in the home and in the car on “re-cycled” air so that smoke is not drawn in from the outside.
- Refrain from running your swamp cooler or whole house fan, as they will pull unfiltered outside air into the house.
- If your home becomes too hot, consider leaving your home and visiting an indoor mall, library, or a friend or relative’s house that has air conditioning.
- Monitor family members who are elderly, pregnant or very young for any difficulty breathing and contacting their medical provider with any questions.
- Make sure family members with heart disease or lung problems such as asthma, bronchitis or emphysema, are following their doctor's advice about medicines and about their respiratory management plan. Call the doctor if your symptoms worsen.

Along with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, San Joaquin County Public Health Services is monitoring the fire situation and air quality conditions and will inform residents if any additional action needs to be taken.

### **Additional information may be found at:**

- San Joaquin County Public Health Services, <http://www.sjcphs.org>
- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, <http://www.valleyair.org/Home.htm>
- San Joaquin County Office of Emergency Services, <http://www.sigov.org/oes/>
- Healthy Air Living, <http://www.healthyairliving.com>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/features/wildfires/index.html>

Attachment: Wildfire Smoke Fact Sheet, pdf

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## **WILDFIRE SMOKE FACT SHEET**

### ***Health Threat from 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.

### ***How to tell if smoke is affecting you***

Smoke can cause:

- Coughing
- A scratchy throat
- Irritated sinuses
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Headaches
- Stinging eyes
- 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 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***

Those at risk include:

- If you have heart or lung disease, such as congestive heart failure, angina, COPD, emphysema, or asthma, you are 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***

- Stay inside with windows and doors shut.
- Use the recycle or re-circulate mode on the air conditioner in your home or car.
- If you do not have an air conditioner and if it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere.
- Avoid cooking and vacuuming, which can increase pollutants indoors.
- Avoid physical exertion.
- Asthmatics should follow their asthma management plan.
- Keep at least a five-day supply of medication on hand.
- Contact your doctor if you have symptoms such as chest pain, chest tightness, shortness of breath, or severe fatigue. This is important not only for people with chronic lung or heart disease, but also for individuals who have not been previously diagnosed with such illnesses. Smoke can “unmask” or produce symptoms of such diseases.
- Keep airways moist by drinking lots of water. Breathing through a warm, wet washcloth can also help relieve dryness.