

Bushfire Smoke and Your Health

Smoke from bushfires can harm your health by reducing the quality of the air you breathe.

What to do if you can see or smell smoke

1. **Make sure you are safe from any immediate fire danger**
2. **Decide if you are at higher risk**

The actions you take will depend on your age or your overall health. People at **higher risk** of health harms from breathing smoky air are:

- those with asthma or lung problems of any kind
- those with other chronic illnesses like heart disease, diabetes or a previous stroke
- older people, especially those over 65 years
- babies and children, especially those less than five years old
- pregnant women.

If you are at **higher risk**, smoke can make your existing health conditions worse. This might mean you need urgent medical care. Air pollution is also one of many factors that can influence the growth and development of babies and children. For this reason, minimising how much smoke you breathe during pregnancy and in early childhood is a sensible precaution.

If you are at **higher risk**, it is important to manage your health and reduce the smoke you breathe.

If you are at **lower risk**, it is unlikely you will be at risk of serious health harms from breathing smoky air. However, smoke is irritating and you may get symptoms such as burning eyes, a sore throat, runny nose or a cough. These should clear up quickly once the smoke goes.

3. Manage your health

If it's smoky, and you have a health condition such as asthma, you should actively manage your symptoms.

- Follow your asthma action plan, or your plan for managing flare-ups of other health conditions.
- If you don't have an action plan, see your GP.
- If your symptoms worsen, call 000, go to your nearest hospital or go to your nearest GP.

4. Reduce the smoke you breathe

These simple steps can help reduce how much smoke you breathe.

- Stay indoors with your windows and doors closed, and avoid physical activity outdoors.
- If there is a break in smoky conditions, open the windows and air out your home.
- If you use an air-conditioner, set it to 'recycle' or 'recirculate'.
- If a lot of smoke from outside gets in or your home gets too hot, consider visiting a friend's place, or a nearby library, shopping centre or sports centre if they have air-conditioning or are out of the smoky area.
- Consider using a portable air cleaner with a high-efficiency particulate air or HEPA filter, available from home electrical stores. These should be set up in a well-sealed room the right size for the filter.
- Be cautious using facemasks. Simple paper or cloth face masks do not provide protection from bushfire smoke. Specialised 'P2' masks, available from most hardware stores, will filter smoke particles but they require an air-tight seal between the mask and your face to be effective. This is difficult to achieve for adults and impossible for children due to their smaller faces.

5. Keep track of smoke

Identifying where there is less smoke can help you reduce the smoke you breathe.

- For Environment Protection Authority air quality data and health advice go to www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/air
- The free AirRater app provides air quality data. It is available at <https://airrater.org>

Air quality is **not measured** everywhere in Tasmania. Smoke can vary from place to place and change quickly. Sometimes the air quality displayed for your nearest EPA monitor or shared via the AirRater app could be different to the conditions you are experiencing.

At all times, keeping safe from immediate fire danger is your highest priority.

For more information

- For all emergency warnings, including information on bushfires and smoke, visit TasALERT at www.alert.tas.gov.au
- For all fire-related information, visit Tasmania Fire Service at www.fire.tas.gov.au
- Check your local news or radio for smoke warnings.
- The Public Health Services Tasmania Hotline is 1800 671 738.