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Prepare Now for Wildfire Smoke, Unhealthy Air Quality

Bellingham, WA – With warming weather and dry conditions, wildfire season is likely on its way. Whatcom County Health Department is urging residents to take steps now to prepare for smoky days with unhealthy air quality that could be ahead.

Breathing smoke from wildfires isn't healthy for anyone, but some people are more likely to have health problems when the air quality isn't good. People at risk for problems include children younger than 18 and adults older than 65, people with heart and lung diseases, people with respiratory illnesses and colds, people who have had a stroke, pregnant women and people who smoke.

The best way to protect your health when the air is smoky is to limit time outdoors and reduce physical activity. This is especially important for people who are at risk for health problems when air quality isn't good.

Here are some steps to take now, before air quality worsens from wildfire smoke:

- **Know where to find information about local air quality.** The Washington State Department of Ecology's [Air Quality Monitoring website](#) has a map of air quality statewide. The map uses [color-coded categories](#) to report when air quality is good, moderate or unhealthy. You can also get up-to-date air quality information from the [Northwest Clean Air Agency](#).
- **If you or a family member has a heart or lung disease, like asthma or COPD, talk to your doctor about precautions to take when air quality is unhealthy.** Make sure you have the necessary medications, and ask your doctor how to manage symptoms and when to seek medical care.
- **Take steps to keep indoor air clean:**
 - [Learn about](#) indoor air filtration options, and consider getting an air purifier to help improve indoor air quality in your home or vehicle.
 - Know how to turn your home or vehicle's air conditioner to recirculate to avoid bringing smoky outdoor air inside.
 - Choose a room in your house that you can designate as a clean air room.
 - Make sure your vehicle has a HEPA-equivalent air filter.
- **Create a plan for alternatives to outdoor family activities.** If the air quality is unhealthy, you may need to exercise indoors, find alternatives to outdoor summer camps, or change vacation arrangements.
- **Develop a relocation plan** in case you need to leave the area when air quality is hazardous.

Respiratory masks labeled N95 or N100 [that are properly fitted](#) can offer limited protection from wildfire smoke, but they don't work for everyone. Masks do not work for children, people with beards, or people with certain health conditions, such as asthma or heart disease. Only use a mask after first trying other, more effective ways to avoid smoke, like staying indoors or limiting outdoor activity.

Additional resources:

- Washington State Department of Health [Smoke From Fires webpage](#)
- Washington State Department of Health [Wildfires webpage](#)
- Washington State [Smoke Blog](#)

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