



Health Advisory

July 30, 2018

Health Advisory for Traveling to Areas Affected by Wildfire Smoke

California wildfires affecting air quality of vacation destinations

Check air quality monitors for up-to-date information

California is experiencing unprecedented wildfires this summer affecting large parts of the state. Because it is summer time, many families are traveling to areas affected by the fires. Unfortunately, wildfire smoke can travel hundreds of miles and affect large geographic areas, including your travel destination. Air quality and smokiness can change quickly. Families should consult the air quality of their destinations when making plans.

Wildfire smoke contains very small particulate matter that are breathed deep into the lungs. This form of air pollution is linked to a number of health problems, including coughing, wheezing, reduced lung function, asthma attacks, heart attacks and strokes. It can have long-term health impacts. Additionally, wildfire smoke may contain unknown chemicals and particles from manmade materials that have burned (homes, cars, etc.).

Some groups of people are more sensitive to the adverse health effects of wildfire smoke. They include:

- people with cardiovascular disease (diseases of the heart and blood vessels)
- people with lung disease, including asthma and COPD
- children and teenagers
- older adults
- persons with obesity or diabetes may increase risk
- new or expectant mothers may want to take precautions to protect the health of their babies

Children are especially at risk for health effects from exposure to wildfire smoke and ash, mostly because their lungs are still growing. Children who breathe in wildfire smoke and ash can have chest pain and tightness; trouble breathing; wheezing; coughing; nose, throat, and eye burning; dizziness; or other symptoms. Children with asthma, allergies, or chronic health issues may have more trouble breathing when smoke or ash is present.

Note that some areas are also affected by extreme heat and people who are not acclimated to the higher temperature, or are dehydrated, may experience additional stresses on their heart and lungs.

What should we do?

The San Francisco Department of Public Health recommends:



- avoiding areas with poor air quality due to wildfire smoke, especially if traveling with people in the sensitive groups above;
- if you are in a location with poor air quality, monitor conditions frequently and follow EPA guidelines to reduce smoke exposure and reduce health consequences;
- monitor air quality (Air Quality Index) at EPA AirNow (<https://airnow.gov>);
- for more information see the AirNow website specific to wildfires (https://www.airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=topics.smoke_wildfires) and
- review the EPA General Fact Sheet and EPA/PEHSU guidelines for children (two attachments), posted with this Health Advisory on our website at <https://www.sfcdcp.org/health-alerts-emergencies/health-alerts/>.