

Extreme heat and Bushfires

Bushfire Smoke

During days of extreme heat the chance of a bushfire occurring increases. In addition to the health hazards associated with extreme heat, bushfires and the accompanying smoke can pose further health risks.

What is Bushfire Smoke?

Smoke from a bushfire is made up of large particulate matter from burning debris which irritates the eyes, nose, throat and lungs. The finer particles are able to penetrate deep in to the lung tissue and are more harmful. Smoke also contains toxic gases, such as carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen oxides.

Bushfire smoke, if present in high enough concentrations, can cause a number of health problems such as;

- > Breathing difficulty
- > Itchy or burning eyes
- > Throat irritation and runny nose, and
- > Illnesses such as Bronchitis

Smoke particles can also aggravate existing health problems such as Chronic Bronchitis, Emphysema, Asthma and heart conditions. Symptoms can occur several days after exposure so it is important to be vigilant and to continue any previously prescribed treatment.

Signs and symptoms of exposure:

- > Difficulty breathing and or coughing
- > Chest tightness
- > Fatigue
- > Palpitations

Health precautions:

To minimise the effect from exposure to bushfire smoke:

- > Stay indoors with windows and doors closed, or
- > If possible stay in air-conditioned premises switching the air-conditioner to 'recycle' or 'recirculate' to reduce the smoke coming inside
- > Avoid vigorous activities, especially if you have Asthma or other chronic lung or heart conditions

It is especially important for people with Asthma to continue their medication.

If you know you are susceptible to bushfire smoke and it is safe to leave your house, consider:



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- > Staying with a friend or relative whose house has clean indoor air; or
 - > Leaving the area for a cleaner environment

If you have to be outdoors when bushfire smoke is present consider using a mask designed for fine particles (respiratory mask, which may also be labelled P2 or N95 masks). These are available from some hardware stores.

If you or your family members start to feel ill with the symptoms you should **seek medical attention by:**

- > contacting your GP
- > calling healthdirect Australia on 1800 022 222; or
- > going to the Emergency Department of your nearest hospital.

Anyone experiencing difficulty breathing or chest pain should seek urgent medical advice by calling 000 for an ambulance.

For more information on how to cope during extreme heat

Emergency Management Unit
www.health.sa.gov.au

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