



## Division of Public and Behavioral Health Technical Bulletin



**Topic: Protecting your Lungs during a Wildfire**

**Section/Program/Contact: Office of Public Health Informatics and Epidemiology**

**Date: August 29, 2013**

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**TO: All Nevada Health Care Providers**

### **For Patients with Lung or Heart Conditions**

Dangerous smoke resulting from wildfires poses lethal health hazards to people living and working in the surrounding areas. Residents with respiratory problems such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and also those with chronic heart disease should take extra precautions during this time and call their physician immediately if problems develop. People with respiratory problems and chronic heart disease may experience increased symptoms and should contact their doctor promptly, especially those using oxygen. People using oxygen are strongly cautioned to not adjust their levels of intake without consulting their doctor first.

Individuals with asthma are encouraged to contact their physician regarding any changes in medication they may need to cope with smoky conditions. The American Lung Association advises asthma patients who cannot reach their doctor to continue to take their medication and closely follow their asthma action plan as prescribed.

### **For Patients Without Lung or Heart Conditions**


Even those without lung diseases are at risk during this time. Air Quality Indexes other than Good or Moderate present an increased risk of dangerous health effects ranging from respiratory tract irritation to more serious illness, including reduced lung function, bronchitis, exacerbation of asthma, and premature death. This is especially true for older adults and outdoor workers. Take special care to protect children. They are more susceptible to smoke, because their respiratory systems are still developing.

People who work or reside in the smoke plume are encouraged to stay inside as much as possible, with doors, windows and fireplace dampers shut—with clean air circulating through air conditioners and/or air cleaners. Residents should use the recirculation setting on their home air conditioners to avoid outdoor air contamination, but using whole house fans is not recommended, because they can bring in unfiltered outside air.

When driving through smoky areas, car windows and vents should be kept closed. Air conditioning should be set to "recirculate" to avoid exposure to unhealthy outside air. Those living in surrounding areas of the fires should avoid exercising outdoors, particularly if they smell smoke or experience eye or throat irritation.

### **Choose the Correct Mask**

If you choose to wear a dust mask for protection from smoke, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends that disposable particle masks labeled "N95" or "P1000" should be used. They are available at most hardware stores and come with two straps, which can be adjusted to fit tightly on the face. These types of masks can be difficult for people with lung disease to use, so a doctor should be consulted before purchasing.

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