

Helping Clients with Asthma Prepare for Wildfire Smoke Events:

Tips for Asthma Educators



Wildfire smoke – a complex mixture of air pollutants – is unhealthy to breathe and can be especially dangerous for people with asthma. As asthma educators, you can help families prepare for wildfire smoke events, which are becoming increasingly common in California.

Help your clients manage their asthma.

- If they are experiencing symptoms, have your clients contact their physician. If they cannot, urge them to follow their [asthma action plan](#) and to seek medical care if symptoms are not relieved.

Help your clients create clean indoor spaces in their homes.

- During wildfire smoke events, counsel your clients to keep doors and windows closed, and avoid activities that create more indoor pollution, such as frying foods, sweeping, vacuuming, smoking, lighting candles or incense, and using gas stoves.
- [Provide your clients with portable HEPA air cleaner](#) (mechanical rather than electronic) and replacement filters, if possible. If your program isn't able to purchase them, provide clients with information about [purchasing a HEPA air cleaner](#) or creating a [do-it-yourself box fan filtration unit](#).
- If your clients have a central ducted air conditioning and heating system, tell them to set the system to "on" rather than "auto," so that air is being filtered constantly, and to run it on recirculation mode, if possible, to prevent outdoor smoke from getting inside. Encourage them to install a high-efficiency filter (MERV 13 rating or higher), if possible after talking to a professional about system compatibility.

Help your clients decrease exposure to wildfire smoke if they must be outside.

- Encourage your clients to track the Air Quality Index (AQI) in their local area through [AirNOW](#). An AQI level greater than 100 is 'Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups' and greater than 150 is 'Unhealthy' for all people.
- If your clients must be outside during unhealthy conditions, [encourage them to wear an N-95 mask](#) that can filter out damaging fine particles.
- Remind your clients that they shouldn't participate in extra outdoor activities (like playing sports) whether or not they are wearing a mask. Masks can help people breathe less smoke, but they still breathe some smoke, especially if they are being active. They may want to look at [guidelines for school activities](#), which could serve as a good reference when making decisions about personal activities outside.

Encourage your clients to [stay safe in extreme heat](#).

- If they don't have an air conditioner, or they lose power, staying inside with the windows closed may be dangerous in extremely hot weather. In these cases, they should seek alternative shelter such as a community cooling center. It is also important to stay hydrated!

Additional Resources

General guidance for clients

- Asthma, Smoke & Air Purifiers: A fact sheet for community residents in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#), [Tagalog](#), [Arabic](#), and [Vietnamese](#). Developed by RAMP.
- Protecting Children from Wildfire Smoke ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)). Developed by the Western States Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit
- [Wildfire Infographic](#). Developed by Western States Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit. Also see this [alternative](#) version. [Infografía sobre el humo de incendio forestal \(versión alternativa\)](#)
- [Protecting Lung Health During Wildfires \[Español\] \[Chinese\] \[Vietnamese\] \[Tagalog\] \[Russian\]](#). Developed by the American Lung Association
- [Wildfire Fact Sheets](#). Developed by the US EPA

Guidance on mask use for clients

- [Masks to Protect Children and Pregnant People from Wildfire Smoke](#). Developed by Western States Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit. [Mascarillas para proteger a los niños y personas embarazadas contra el humo de incendio forestal](#)

Guidance on air cleaners

- [Air Cleaners for Asthma Programs](#).
- [Examples of Air Cleaners for Asthma Programs](#) spreadsheet
- How to Choose a Safe & Effective Air Cleaner: for [Consumers](#), for [Agencies and Programs](#), for [Schools](#)
- Video on how to use an air cleaner [[English](#) and [Spanish](#); also embedded below]

Air Quality Index Information

- [AirNow website](#)
- [Be Smoke Ready](#) – Know the Colors of the AQI ([Spanish](#))

