



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Ashwin Vasani, MD, PhD
Commissioner

2024 Health Advisory 14: Guidance During Wildfire Smoke

Please distribute all clinical staff in emergency medicine, family medicine, geriatrics, internal medicine, pediatrics, psychiatry, pharmacy, and primary care.

May 16, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

Smoke from wildfires occurring far from New York City (NYC) can impact our air quality. As climate change increases so will the frequency and severity of wildfires across the US and Canada. New York State issues advisories when [air quality is forecast](#) to be concerning for health. While predicting the impacts of wildfire smoke for the city is difficult, we must anticipate potential poor air quality and prepare our communities.

Groups that may be more sensitive to wildfire smoke

- People with heart or respiratory conditions, such as asthma or COPD
- People who are immunocompromised
- Older adults
- People who are pregnant
- Infants and children (especially young children) with heart or respiratory conditions or who are immunocompromised
- People with social vulnerabilities, such as lack of access to safe housing or health care, lack of transportation, and other protective factors

Speak with your patients to provide the preventative guidance below and advise them to consult with you or their other providers if they have questions or feel ill.

Effective steps people can take to reduce the effects of wildfire smoke

- Listen to your body — if you are feeling the effects from poor air quality like watery eyes, scratchy throat or difficulty breathing, reduce physical activity and/or go indoors.
- Keep windows closed when you are indoors.
- Very hot weather can be more dangerous than poor air quality. If it is hot outside, make sure you find a cool indoor space. If you don't have AC, try to move to a public air-conditioned place like a library, or visit a friend or family with home AC. If you must stay home without AC, keep your windows open, but seek help if you are experiencing the effects from poor air quality. For more information, see the 2024 Health Advisory #9 "[Help Prevent Heat-Related Illness and Death](#)".
- If you use AC, close the fresh air intake to avoid bringing smokey air indoors.
- Use an air purifier if you have one and set it at the highest level.

- Wearing high-quality masks (N-95 or KN95) can reduce smoke exposure if you must be outdoors but is not a substitute for staying indoors. Providers should provide [guidance to their patients regarding mask use](#).
- Monitor changing air quality conditions on the [EPA Air Now](#) site at: <https://www.airnow.gov/>
- Follow [Health Department guidance](#) for activity recommendations when air quality changes.

Health effects of wildfire smoke

- Most healthy people recover quickly from wildfire smoke exposure and do not suffer long-term health consequences. See [Wildfire Smoke Considerations for Public Health Officials](#).
- Exposure to particulate matter (PM) is currently the primary documented public health threat from wildfire smoke. Fine particles from smoke and coarse particles from ash are respiratory irritants that can cause coughing, wheezing, and difficulty breathing.
- The adverse short term health impact of wildfire smoke has been most prominently shown for asthma emergency department visits in NYC, NY State, and other U.S. regions. Wildfire smoke is also known to exacerbate cardiovascular conditions that can result in hospitalizations and deaths.
- Encourage your patients to sign up for [Notify NYC](#) messages from the City of New York to receive emergency updates and alerts.
- For AQI above 200 (categorized as “Very Unhealthy” or “Hazardous”), consider rescheduling appointments or using telehealth, depending on patient circumstances.

For additional insights in providing healthcare during air quality events, read the following:

- [Clinical Outcomes Related to Particulate Matter Exposure and Cardiovascular Disease](#)
- [Climate Resilience for Frontline Clinics Toolkit](#)

Thank you for your help in keeping New Yorkers healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

Sarah Johnson

Sarah Johnson, MS, MPH
Executive Director, Air Quality Program
Bureau of Environmental Surveillance and Policy

Michelle Morse

Michelle Morse, MD, MPH
Chief Medical Officer
Deputy Commissioner, Center for Health Equity & Community Wellness