

Wildfire Smoke and Face Masks

Wildfire smoke can irritate your eyes, nose, throat, and lungs. It can make you cough and wheeze, and can make it hard to breathe. If you have a lung disease or heart disease, inhaling wildfire smoke can be especially harmful.

The most effective ways to protect yourself from wildfire smoke are to stay indoors, limit time outdoors and reduce physical activity. People who must be outside in smoky air may benefit from wearing masks called “particulate respirators.” Most people will find it difficult to wear the masks correctly. If the mask does not fit properly, it will provide little or no protection. Using respirator masks can make it harder to breathe. Anyone with lung or heart disease should check with their health care provider before using any mask.

Will a face mask protect me from wildfire smoke?

Respirator masks worn correctly may provide some protection by filtering out fine particles in the smoke. Masks do not help with hazardous gases in the smoke.

What face mask should I get?

N95 respirators are the cheapest and most available mask to help protect your lungs from wildfire smoke. They are generally available at hardware stores and pharmacies. Make sure the mask is:

- Certified by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).
- Not a one-strap paper dust mask or surgical mask. It should have two straps that go around your head.
- A size that fits over your nose and under your chin. It should seal tightly to your face. If the mask does not fit properly, it may not provide any protection. Masks with a relief valve will make breathing easier.

How do I use a face mask?

- Place the mask over your nose and under your chin, with one strap placed below the ears and one strap above.
- Adjust the mask so that air cannot get through at the edges. Any leakage around the edges of the mask allows unfiltered air to enter.
- Pinch the metal part of the mask tightly over the top of your nose.
- Follow instructions on the package to check for a tight face seal.
- Masks fit best on clean-shaven skin. Masks do not work for people with beards because they will not seal.
- Masks are not approved for children.
- Throw away your mask when breathing through it gets difficult, if it is damaged, or if the inside gets dirty.
- It is harder to breathe through a mask, so take breaks often if you work outside.
- If you feel dizzy or sick go to a less smoky area, take off your mask, and get medical help if you do not feel better.



N95 masks can help protect your lungs from wildfire smoke. Straps must go above and below the ears.



A one-strap paper mask will not protect your lungs from wildfire smoke.



A surgical mask will not protect your lungs from wildfire smoke.

For More Information:

Washington State Department of Health
doh.wa.gov/smokefromfires

NIOSH
[Respirator – Trusted Source Information](https://www.niosh.gov/respirator)