



In the Loop

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Staying Safe From Wildfire Smoke

In many parts of the country, wildfire season is now in full effect. Wildfires pose a serious threat to life, property and health. Although many people only think about the direct damage fire can cause, smoke inhalation is also dangerous. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), wildfire smoke contains fine inhalable particles known as PM2.5, which are a public health concern.

Air pollution from wildfires can be widespread and may affect states and countries that aren't experiencing wildfires. Here are some strategies to help you stay safe from air pollution during wildfire season:

- **Follow guidance from local and state officials.** Stay up to date on any emergency alerts in your area. Pay attention to information and instructions from local and state officials, particularly regarding evacuating your home and when it's safe to return.
- **Keep smoke outside.** Health experts recommend staying indoors to reduce exposure to smoke pollution during wildfires. However, contaminants can still get inside your home. Protect yourself by shutting all windows and doors in your home. A quality heating, ventilating and air conditioning system with air filters

can help remove particles from the air, as can a portable air cleaner.

- **Wear a fitted N95 mask.** The EPA recommends using a particulate respirator labeled NIOSH, N95 or P100 to protect against air pollution. Two straps above and below your ears will create a good seal. However, masks only protect against particles, so experts advise staying indoors on days with poor air quality.
- **Protect pets.** Smoke can irritate your pet's eyes and respiratory tract. Animals with heart or lung disease and older pets are especially at risk from smoke. They should be kept inside as much as possible and watched closely.
- **Track wildfires.** Be prepared for wildfires and smoke pollution by staying up to date on fires near you. For example, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's [fire weather outlook website](#) tracks fire watches and warnings.



- **Monitor your local air quality.** Websites, including the EPA's [AirNow.gov](https://www.airnow.gov), can explain which air quality levels may be hazardous and how much outdoor activity you should engage in at current levels. Apps that report on local air quality are also available.
- **Pay attention to health symptoms.** Children and people with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or heart disease must be especially careful about breathing wildfire smoke. Older adults and pregnant people are also more likely to get sick if they breathe in wildfire smoke.

Staying current on wildfires in or around the country and avoiding unnecessary exposure to air pollution will help you stay safe during the wildfire season. Monitor local news outlets for updates and contact your health care provider with further questions.

Americans Ages 8-64 Should Be Screened for Anxiety

For the first time, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) recommends that all adults under 65 get regular anxiety screenings. This recommendation is meant to help primary care clinicians identify early signs of anxiety, which could otherwise go undetected for years.

The Task Force advisory recommends screening for adults under the age of 65 who don't have a diagnosed mental health disorder or related symptoms. They have also increased focus on specific populations, including children ages 8 to 17 and people who are pregnant or postpartum.

Anxiety disorders often begin in childhood and early adulthood. The Task Force characterizes such disorders as causing a greater duration or intensity of stress response to everyday events. According to the American Psychiatric Association, anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorder, affecting 3 out of 10 adults at some point in their lives. Fortunately, with proper diagnosis, these conditions are also largely treatable.

Screening is crucial for diagnosis because anxiety symptoms might not be noticeable during annual doctor visits. The Task Force recommends individuals be assessed and connected with care immediately if they show signs or symptoms of anxiety.

Anxiety symptoms look different for everyone, but common symptoms include irritability, restlessness, trouble sleeping, anxious thoughts, and unexplained aches and pains.

There are numerous types of recognized anxiety disorders, including:

- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Social anxiety disorder
- Agoraphobia
- Panic disorder
- Separation anxiety disorder

Various screening tools, including scales and questionnaires, can help your physician assess your anxiety.

Contact your doctor for more information on anxiety or other mental health conditions.

