

# Protect Yourself From Breathing Wildfire Smoke

by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
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**SPRINGFIELD**— With smoke from wildfires in Canada traveling down into the region, the air quality has deteriorated rapidly, leading the National Weather Service in Lincoln to issue an air quality alert.

HSHS Medical Group pulmonologist Dr. Brian Reichardt shared, “People can see that it looks smoggy in the air but may not realize the affect wildfire smoke can have on the lungs, especially for older adults, pregnant women, children, and people with

preexisting respiratory and heart conditions. If there is enough smoke in the air, it can affect someone who is healthy if they are exposed to it long enough.”

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov) (CDC), breathing in smoke can have immediate health effects, including:

- Coughing
- Trouble breathing normally
- Stinging eyes
- A scratchy throat
- Runny nose
- Irritated sinuses
- Wheezing and shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Headaches
- An asthma attack
- Tiredness
- Fast heartbeat

Those whose age or health conditions such as asthma puts them in a higher-risk category are encouraged to limit their exposure as much as possible. Here are some tips from the CDC to protect your health:

1. **Pay attention to local air quality reports and the US Air Quality Index at [airnow.gov](https://airnow.gov).** Pay attention to public health messages and take extra safety measures such as avoiding spending time outdoors.
2. **If you are told to stay indoors, stay indoors and keep your indoor air as clean as possible.** Keep windows and doors closed unless it is very hot outside. Run an air conditioner if you have one but keep the fresh-air intake closed and the filter clean to prevent outdoor smoke from getting inside. Seek shelter elsewhere if you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed.
3. **Use an air filter.** Use a freestanding indoor air filter with particle removal to help protect people with heart disease, asthma or other respiratory conditions and the elderly and children from the effects of wildfire smoke. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions on filter replacement and where to place the device.
4. **Do not add to indoor pollution.** When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns, such as candles and fireplaces. Do not vacuum, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home. Do not smoke tobacco or other products, because smoking puts even more pollution into the air.

5. **Follow your doctor's advice about medicines and about your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease or cardiovascular disease.** Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.
6. **Do not rely on dust masks for protection.** Paper "comfort" or "dust" masks commonly found at hardware stores trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke. An "N95" mask, properly worn, will offer some protection. If you decide to keep a mask on hand, see the [Respirator Fact Sheet](#) provided by CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

For more information on protecting yourself during low air quality days, visit [cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/smoke.html](https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/smoke.html).

HSHS Illinois hospitals include St. John's Hospital in Springfield, St. Elizabeth's Hospital in O'Fallon, St. Mary's Hospital in Decatur, St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital in Effingham, St. Francis Hospital in Litchfield, St. Joseph's Hospital in Breese, Holy Family Hospital in Greenville, St. Joseph's Hospital in Highland and Good Shepherd Hospital in Shelbyville.

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*