



FLASH REPORT

August 30, 2017

An Urgent Public Health Activity Report Within Jackson County

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Wildfire Smoke Guidance

Jackson County public health officials urge individuals and schools to take precautions from wildfire smoke, as air quality levels are at unhealthy for sensitive groups and unhealthy. The wildfire smoke may increase the risk of illness, especially for older adults, young children, and people with asthma, respiratory, or heart conditions. It is important for people to be observant of the air quality as smoke levels can rise and fall depending on weather factors, including wind direction.

During a wildfire, Jackson County public health officials advise residents to take the following precautions:

- Be aware of smoke concentrations in your area and avoid the places with highest concentrations.
- Avoid smoke either by leaving the area or protecting yourself by staying indoors, and by closing windows and doors.
- Avoid strenuous outdoor activity in smoky conditions.
- People exposed to smoky conditions and who suffer from asthma or other respiratory problems should follow their breathing management plans or contact their healthcare providers.

Check [DEQ's Air Quality Index](#) to see real-time air monitoring data from monitors placed around Oregon. Performing a visibility test is important because air monitors report out using an hour and 24-hour average, and smoke levels can rise and fall very quickly.

Visual Assessment Using the Visibility Index Guide

Conduct a visual assessment: People can conduct a visual assessment of nearby smoke to quickly get a sense of air quality levels by using the [5-3-1 index](#). Residents will want to determine the limit of their visual range by looking for distant targets or familiar land marks, such as mountains, buildings, and hills at a known distance. The visual range is that point at which these targets are no longer visible. Once a distance has been determined, follow the guidance below:

If under 5 miles: The air quality is unhealthy for young children, adults over age 65, pregnant women, and people with heart and/or lung disease, asthma or other respiratory illness. These people should minimize outdoor activity.

If under 3 miles: The air quality is unhealthy for everyone. Young children, adults over age 65, pregnant women, and people with heart and/or lung disease, asthma or other respiratory illness should avoid all outdoor activities.

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Guidelines



If under 1 mile: The air quality is very unhealthy, and in some cases may be hazardous. Everyone should avoid all outdoor activities. If visibility is well over five miles, the air quality is generally good. No matter how far you can see, if someone feels that they are having health effects from wildfire smoke exposure they should take extra care to stay inside or get to an area with better air quality. They should also see their doctor or health professional as needed.

Masks

It is highly recommended that people stay inside and limit their outdoor activity. This is going to be your best defense in protecting your health from wildfire smoke.

If people must be outdoors, wearing a special mask called a “particulate respirator” can also help protect lungs from wildfire smoke. Dust masks that are not NIOSH-certified may not offer protection from small particulate matter, even if properly worn. NIOSH-certified N95 respirators are masks made of filtering material that fit over the nose and mouth. The filter material will filter out some of the small particles that may be found in smoke, but only if there is a good fit to the wearer’s face. It is also important to know that N95 particulate respirator and dust masks only filter particles, not toxic gases and vapors.

Most people will find it difficult to use the NIOSH-certified N95 respirators correctly for general use. For instance, it is impossible to get a good seal on children and individuals with facial hair. It is important to make sure the respirator fits properly and that air does not leak around the sides. If it does not fit properly, the respirator will provide little if any protection, and may offer the wearer a false sense of protection. To make sure that the mask is the correct N95 mask and is properly sealed, one is recommended to be fit tested by professionally trained personnel.

Filtering face-piece respirators and masks can make the work of breathing more difficult and can lead to increased breathing rates and heart rates. They can also contribute to heat stress.

Because of this, respirator use by those with heart and respiratory diseases should only be done under a doctor’s supervision. Even healthy adults may find that the increased effort required for breathing makes it uncomfortable to wear a respirator for more than short periods of time.

School Guidance

Jackson County and Oregon Health Authority (OHA) public health officials are advising schools and athletic departments to be aware of wildfire smoke and utilize the [Public Health Guidance for School Outdoor Activities During Wildfire Smoke Events](#) to make decisions as it pertains to youth having recess, P.E. and athletic practices and events outdoors.

School officials are encouraged to check the local Air Quality Index on the DEQ website and then do a visual inspection outside. Performing a visibility test is important because air monitors report out using an hour and 24-hour average, and smoke levels can rise and fall very quickly. It is recommended to err on the side of caution.

Employers

For employers with questions around employee health and wildfire smoke, contact [Oregon OSHA](#).

The best way to reduce your exposure to wildfire smoke is avoid smoke either by leaving the area or protecting yourself by staying indoors, and by closing windows and doors; avoid strenuous outdoor activity in smoky conditions; people exposed to smoky conditions and who suffer from asthma or other respiratory problems should follow their breathing management plans or contact their healthcare providers.

For information on smoke and wildfires in Oregon, visit:

- For more information on using the visibility index during wildfires <http://www.oregon.gov/deq/daq/Pages/Wildfires-Visibility.aspx>
- Public Health Guidance for School Outdoor Activities During Wildfire Smoke <https://apps.state.or.us/Forms/Served/1e8815h.pdf>
- For information on smoke and wildfires in Oregon, visit <http://oregonsmoke.blogspot.com/> For information on smoke and wildfires in California, visit <http://californiasmokeinfo.blogspot.com/>
- For more information about wildfires and health threats from wildfire smoke, go to <http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Pages/PrepareForWildfire.aspx>

The mission of Jackson County Health and Human Services is to plan, coordinate and provide public services that protect and promote the health and well-being of county residents.