

# Bushfire smoke and your health

## What is the impact of bushfire smoke on my health?

Smoke from bushfires is made up of very small particles and gases. Smoke particles in the air can irritate your eyes, nose and throat.

These particles can also penetrate deep into the lungs and aggravate existing lung and heart conditions.

## What are the health effects of exposure to bushfire smoke / poor air quality?

For most people the health effects are relatively mild symptoms like sore eyes, nose and throat, and/or cough. These symptoms are temporary.

People with a lung or heart condition such as emphysema, angina and asthma will generally have similarly mild symptoms, but they may experience a worsening of their condition that could lead to a more severe response such as an asthma attack or heart attack.

People who may be most vulnerable are:

- infants and young children
- the elderly
- people with respiratory conditions, such as asthma, bronchitis and emphysema
- people with heart disease.

## How can smoke impact on heart conditions?

When smoke particles cross from the lungs into the bloodstream, it can contribute to inflammation and narrowing of blood vessels, as well as increasing the chance of blood clots, in vulnerable people.

This can worsen pre-existing conditions like heart failure and high blood pressure and can trigger events such as heart attacks.

**The Heart Foundation recommends that people limit outdoor physical activity if they are in smoke or fire-affected areas, especially if the air quality is very poor or hazardous.**

**This recommendation extends to the activities of Heart Foundation Walking participants in smoke or bushfire affected areas.**

## How can you protect yourself?

- Avoid physical activity outdoors (exercise allows more fine particles to be breathed deeper into the lungs).
- Anyone with a heart or lung condition should follow the treatment plan advised by their doctor and keep at least five days supply of medication on hand.
- People with asthma should follow their personal asthma plan.
- When smoke is in the air, but a fire is not directly threatening you, stay indoors and close all windows and doors.
- If you operate an air conditioner during smoky conditions, switch it to 'recycle' or 'recirculate' to reduce smoke coming inside your home.
- If your home is smoky inside, try to take an air-conditioned break at a local community library or shopping centre.
- If there is a break in smoky conditions, make sure you open doors and windows to improve indoor air quality.
- Help any vulnerable family members, neighbours and friends. It is important to identify locations that have cleaner, filtered air-conditioned spaces (eg. shopping centres, community centres, libraries etc).
- During extended, very smoky conditions, sensitive individuals should consider temporarily staying with a friend or relative living outside the smoke-affected area.