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Protecting yourself from wildfire smoke

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The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control has declared an air quality alert day for fine particulates, caused by smoke from widespread forest fires.

Numerous large wildfires within the southern Appalachian Mountain Region in the Carolinas, Georgia and Eastern Tennessee are producing large smoke plumes. These smoke plumes are expected to create unhealthy breathing conditions where the smoke is most concentrated.

Wildfire smoke can make anyone sick, even healthy individuals if there is enough smoke in the air. It is even more dangerous for older adults, pregnant women, children, and people with respiratory and heart conditions.

Breathing in smoke can have immediate health effects including, coughing, trouble breathing normally, stinging eyes, scratchy throat, runny nose, irritated sinuses, wheezing and shortness of breath, chest pain, headaches, asthma attacks, tiredness, and fast heartbeat.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Seven Tips for Protecting Yourself from Wildfire Smoke

- 1. Pay attention to local air quality reports.** When a wildfire occurs in your area, watch for news or health warnings about smoke. Pay attention to public health messages and take extra safety measures such as avoiding spending time outdoors.
- 2. Pay attention to current condition updates.** For the most up to date information please visit the DHEC website, www.scdhec.gov, and watch your local weather forecasts.
- 3. If you are told to stay indoors, stay indoors and keep your indoor air as clean as possible.** Keep windows and doors closed. Run an air conditioner or central heat 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.
- 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.** 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.
- 7. Avoid smoke exposure during outdoor recreation.** Wildfires and prescribed burns—fires that are set on purpose to manage land—can create smoky conditions. Before you travel to a park or forest, check to see if any wildfires are happening or if any prescribed burns are planned.

Please visit www.scdhec.gov for additional information.

