When the smoke rolls into our valley it affects all of us. With a changing climate, wildfire season is longer and fires occur at a higher frequency and intensity. While we don’t have control over wildfire smoke, there are things we can do to stay healthy.

What’s the problem?
Wildfire smoke contains small particulate matter called PM2.5. These microscopic particles can easily get into our lungs or even enter our bloodstream. This is unhealthy for everyone and can trigger symptoms in those with asthma or other respiratory problems. It’s important to understand just how unhealthy the air is on any smoky day.

Who is at risk?
Anyone with asthma, other lung diseases, or heart conditions has an added health risk when it’s smoky. With small children, asthma may not yet be observable or diagnosed. Kids are more susceptible to respiratory illnesses, and those with asthma are particularly vulnerable.

What do people experience?
Coughing, trouble breathing, stinging eyes, running nose, scratchy throat, headaches, fast heartbeat, exhaustion, and grumpiness. People with asthma may experience more frequent and more severe asthma attacks. Lengthy, repeated and frequent exposure to smoke may present long-term health risks, but this has been little studied. Luckily, there are things we can do (see over).

How do I know when the air is unhealthy?
The basic visibility rules are:
- Cannot see 5 miles? Unhealthy
- Cannot see 2 miles? Very Unhealthy
- Cannot see 1 mile? Hazardous

Go to: todaysair.mt.gov

3 ways to find out:

- LOOK outside
- CHECK Today’s Air
- CALL The Missoula area Air Quality Hotline 406-258-3600

Asthma & Wildfire Smoke
What should my family do?
• Limit time and activity level outside - consider quieter indoor activities.
• Head indoors and tighten up your residence. Keep windows and doors closed if not too hot.
• Purchase one or more HEPA Portable Air Cleaners. These can be purchased locally or online ($100-$250) and are especially good for a room where an at risk individual sleeps. Be sure they filter particles < 1 micron in size (avoid “HEPA-like” filters that don’t). Our website has more information + recommendations.
• If you have A/C, turn on recirculate and clean your filters.
• If you have access, upgrade your HVAC filter to the best one your system can handle (see our website).
• Take medications as directed and monitor symptoms. If symptoms worsen, see your healthcare provider.
• Create or update an Asthma Action Plan.
• Check the current and forecasted air quality reports so you can get outside and exercise when the air is healthy! Go to montanawildfiresmoke.org for air quality resources.

What should we not do?
• Be super active outdoors. With unhealthy or hazardous air, it’s not the time to run, bike, or play hard outdoors.
• Rely on a bandana or single string dust mask. N95 2-string masks can help, but they are difficult to fit and make breathing harder.
• Add more particulate matter to your home by burning anything (candles, cigarettes, incense), via vacuuming or even some cooking.
• Be in despair! The smoke will clear and the skies will be blue and bright again soon...

AND DO share this information and check in on others who may be particularly vulnerable.

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