



CLIMATE SMART
MISSOULA

HEPA Portable Air Cleaners Available

July 2020

To all daycare centers and preschools of Missoula County:

Summer Greetings. We hope you are staying healthy during these challenging times. Thank you for providing child care and schooling to our young ones.

The Missoula City-County Health Department (MCCHD) and Climate Smart Missoula are once again working to prepare our community for wildfire smoke. These efforts this year may be even more critical because of the potential intersection of smoke and COVID-19.

We may be able to assist you in protecting the health and safety of the children in your centers again this year. Keep reading to find out why and how.

We know the tiny particles found in wildfire smoke (PM2.5) are harmful to human health. These ultrafine bits can travel deep into lungs and enter the bloodstream, causing lung, heart, and immune system problems. Studies have also shown neurological problems associated with air pollution. Infants and youth are especially at risk because their lungs and brains are still developing, and they have higher breathing rates and weaker immune systems than adults. Smoke exposure in youth has been linked to asthma, reduced lung capacity, and respiratory infections including bronchitis and pneumonia.

This year we have the added complication of the COVID-19 pandemic. While being outdoors is generally safer for reducing your chances of catching COVID-19, the air outside may not be safe to breathe during a wildfire smoke event. In addition, exposure to wildfire smoke has the potential to exacerbate COVID-19 symptoms and lead to worse health outcomes.

We also know that our climate is changing. Summers in Montana are longer and hotter, and wildfire season lasts longer. Smoke from wildfires is a growing issue in Montana valleys.

There are multiple ways to prepare for wildfire smoke and minimize health impacts. Reducing physical activity and staying indoors are two good pieces of advice. However, in looking at air quality data collected in 2017, we've discovered that **unfiltered indoor air is almost as bad as being outside** during periods of heavy smoke. This means that for youth, it is crucial to have good indoor air filtration.

MCCHD and Climate Smart Missoula have a cache of HEPA Portable Air Cleaners (PACs, aka Air Filtration Units) that can remove 99.97% of smoke particles from the air in a medium to large room. We want daycares and preschools to have these. If your center does not presently have them:

[Fill out this survey](#) in order to potentially receive one (or more) of our HEPA PACs. There's a limited supply, so first come, first serve.

If you received donated HEPA PACs from us in 2019 or 2018 and still have them, just skip the survey. Note that this is a good time to ensure the units are out and working. Have you replaced the HEPA filter? We have recommendations for care [here](#). And we have information and brochures you can download and share with your client families [here](#).

Also, although it's been a wet and cool summer and the next few weeks should remain nice, once wildfire smoke season here, it's important to be aware of changing conditions. Stay up-to-date with the wildfire smoke information at MCCHD's [Current Air Quality page](#). Check the most recent PM2.5 concentrations at Montana's [Today's Air website](#).

And visit montanawildfiresmoke.org for more advice for how to stay safe during smoke events.

Thank you and if you have questions feel free to contact us, and email is easiest –

Amy and Sarah

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