

# Kids and Wildfire Smoke



When the smoke rolls into our valley it affects all of us. With a changing climate, wildfire season is longer and fires are occurring at a higher frequency and intensity. While we don't have control over smoke, there are things we can do to stay safe and keep kids 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 especially young people. It's important to understand just how unhealthy the air is on any smoky day.

## Who is at risk?

Because children's lungs are still developing, babies, children, and pregnant women are particularly sensitive to smoke. Kids also tend to be more active and breathe in more PM2.5. Smoke can trigger asthma, and in young children, asthma may not yet be observable or diagnosed. Babies and kids are also more susceptible to respiratory illnesses which can be worsened with smoke. Anyone with a preexisting lung or heart condition may be at risk.

## What do kids experience?

Coughing, trouble breathing, stinging eyes, running nose, scratchy throat, headaches, exhaustion, and grumpiness. Kids 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 to know when the air is unhealthy?

### 3 ways to find out:

#### LOOK outside

The basic visibility rules are:

- o Cannot see 5 miles?  
*Unhealthy*
- o Cannot see 2 miles?  
*Very Unhealthy*
- o Cannot see 1 mile?  
*Hazardous*

#### CHECK Today's Air

Go to: [todaysair.mt.gov](http://todaysair.mt.gov)

 **CALL**  
The Missoula area  
Air Quality Hotline  
**406-258-3600**



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## Stay Healthy in 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).
- If a child has a respiratory illness or asthma, consult with your healthcare provider.
- Check the current and forecasted air quality reports so you can get outside and exercise when the air is healthy! Go to [montanawildfiresmoke.org](http://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 around, bike, or play hard outdoors.
- Rely on a bandana or a single string dust mask. N95 2-string masks can help, but they are difficult to fit, make breathing harder, and are not made for children.
- 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...



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