Tip Sheet for Patients

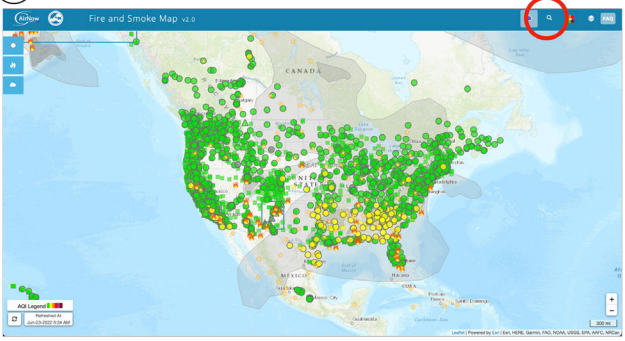
Staying Safe During Wildfires

1. Know when being outside may not be safe.

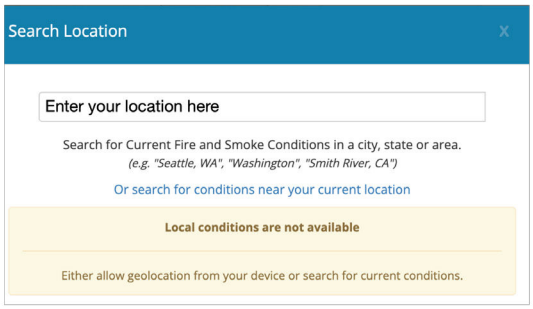
Check for fires and wildfire smoke near you on your phone, computer, or local news station. Most phone weather apps now include information on air quality (see below).

You can also get information on wildfires at fire.airnow.gov. The website may take a minute to load. Follow steps 1-5 below to see fire and air quality conditions near you.

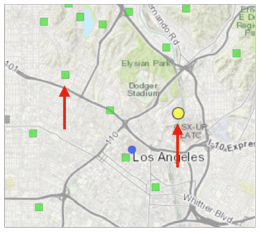
1 Click on magnifying glass to open search box



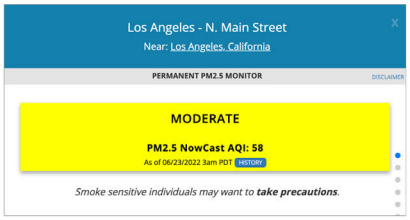
2 Type your location in the search box



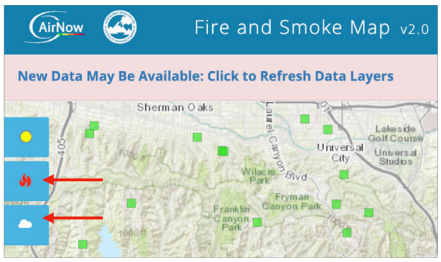
3 Click on a square or circle to see your local air quality



4 Your local air quality report will be displayed. Scroll down for more information.



5 To see fires and smoke near you, click the fire and cloud icons located on the upper left of the map.



The website will tell you how safe the air outside is to breathe by giving you an air quality index (AQI) number for your community. The higher the AQI number, the less safe the air is.

The weather apps mentioned above will tell you about the current air quality. To see what your air quality will be in the future, visit airnow.gov and enter your zip code.

When wildfires are near where you live, or if you can see smoke in the air, you may need to check every hour as air quality can change quickly.

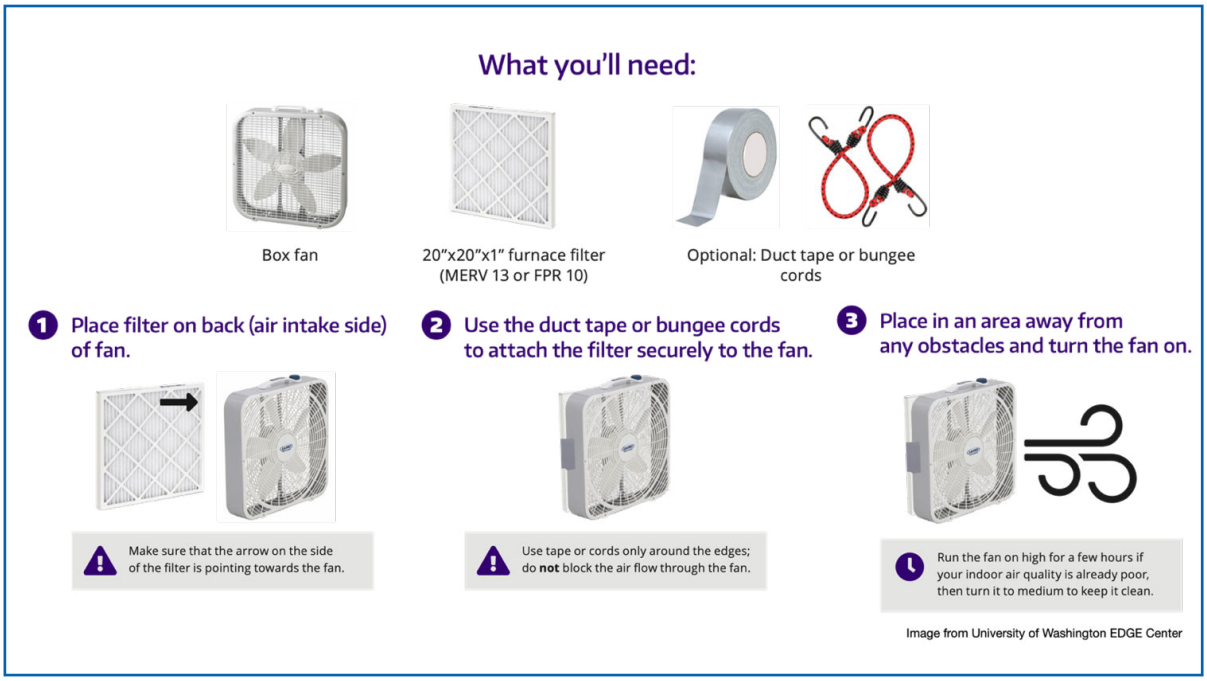
Review the "Wildfire Action Plan for Patients" with your provider to know what you should do when your local air is unsafe to breathe.

2. When the air outside is dangerous, keep the air inside your home as clean as possible.

Do not smoke, or burn firewood, candles, or incense.

Cooking stoves, especially gas cooking stoves, release air pollution. If you have an exhaust vent, use it when cooking. If you do not have an exhaust vent, **try to not cook with the stove or oven if the AQI is above 100 (or above 50 if you have asthma or COPD).**

To make an affordable and effective **indoor air filter**, you can use a box fan and air filters bought from a hardware store or ordered online. Follow the instructions below or watch this video to learn how.



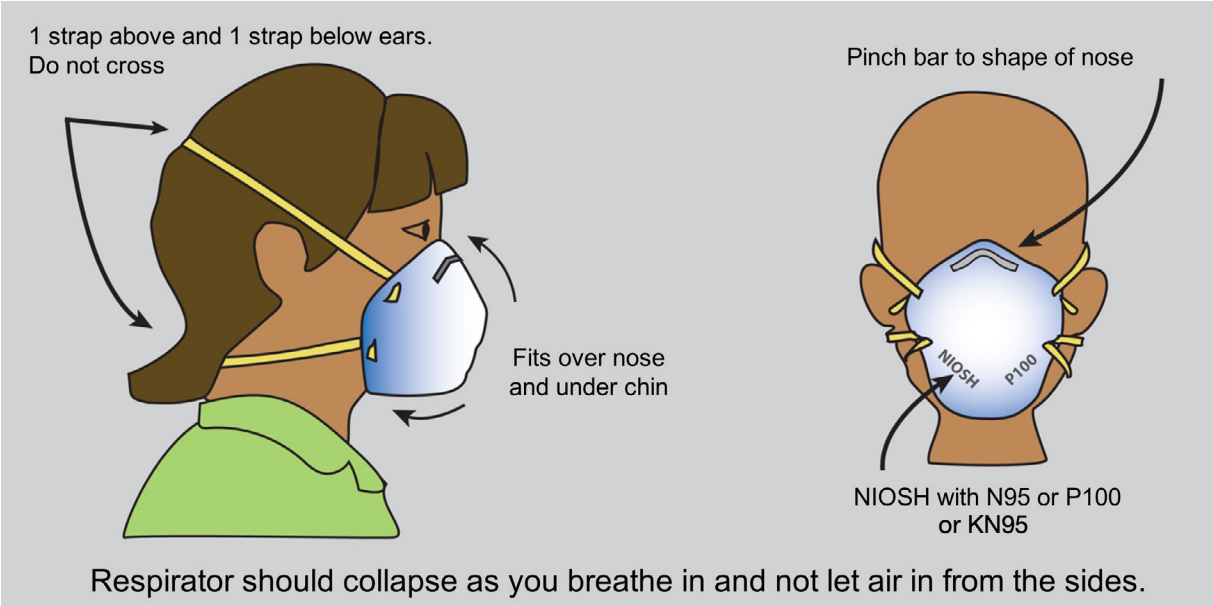
If you keep your windows and doors closed and use an indoor air filter, you can **create a clean room in your home**. To learn more about clean rooms that protect you from wildfire smoke and how to make one, read here or watch this video.

3. Wear a mask if it is appropriate given your health status.

Only masks labelled N95, KN95, or P100 will effectively filter wildfire smoke. The masks come in different sizes and must fit well to filter pollution. Children older than 2 years of age can wear a well-fitting surgical or cloth mask. C hildren over about

7 years old can wear a small or extra small N95/KN95/P100 mask. Adults usually wear a small or “regular” size. Children younger than 2 years of age should not wear a mask.

The picture below shows how to correctly wear an N95, KN95, or P100 mask.

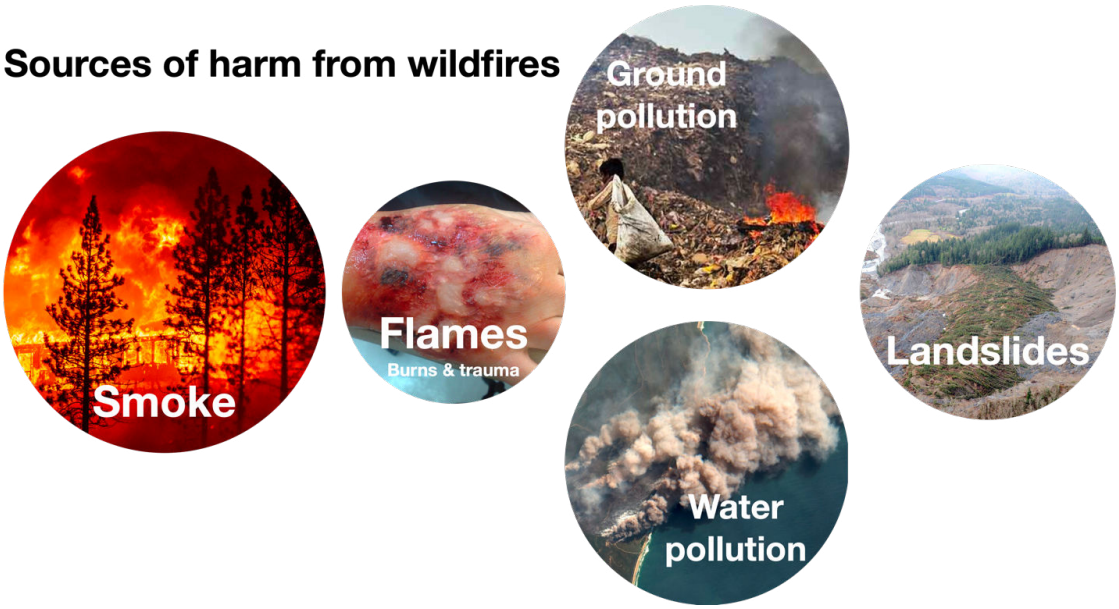


For more instruction on how to put on a mask (in several languages) see here. (Click on “Languages” under the heading “How to use your N95 Respirator” to choose a language.)

Masks should be thrown away when they get visibly dirty.

4. Understand all the risks from wildfires.

In addition to smoke and flames, fires can pose health risks even after they stop burning.



Smoke

Fires burn through everything in their path and can release toxic substances into soil and water making them unsafe for growing food or drinking.

Wildfire smoke harms everyone's health, but certain individuals may be more at risk. You could be extra sensitive to smoke if you:

- have a breathing condition, such as asthma or COPD
- have heart disease (CVD), such as heart failure
- are over 65
- work outdoors
- are pregnant

You can check if there is smoke in the air near you at airnow.gov.

Flames

Fires can result in burns, as well as injury from collapsing buildings and structures, falls, and car accidents as people evacuate. Maps of current fires and wildfire smoke can be found at fire.airnow.gov.

Water and Ground Pollution

As fires burn buildings, vehicles, and other items, any chemicals within them can be released into the air, water, and soil. This can pollute drinking water, gardens, and farms. Ash from wildfires may contain the same hazardous chemicals and often covers surfaces in homes.

Landslides

If you live near a hill, and the fire burned the trees and shrubs on the hillside, the soil could become unstable and cause a landslide.

Additional Health Risks from Fires

Risk	Description
Power Outages	If you use electric medical devices, or have electric heating or cooling in your home, you will need to have a back-up power plan in case you lose power. You also may want to evacuate before you are told to do so to avoid the risks of a power outage.
Hot Spots	Hot spots can occur when a small area of material remains hot after a fire. Even after the fire stops burning, hot spots can flare up without warning. Wear shoes with thick soles that will not melt.

Electrocution	Fires can knock down or damage power lines. Do not touch any downed power lines, because they can electrocute you.
Burned Trees, Utility Polls, and Buildings	They can become unstable and fall on people and property.
Carbon Monoxide Exposure	If you lose power, do not heat your home or cook by burning fuels, such as wood or propane, indoors, as these can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning.

5. Try to protect your home from wildfire damage by creating "defensible space".

Defensible space is the buffer you create between your home and the grass, trees, shrubs, or other items around it that can catch fire. This space can slow the spread of wildfire and gives firefighters a safer area to work to defend your home.

You can create defensible space around your home by removing any flammable material, such as shrubs and trees, to lessen the potential of flames reaching your house. Other steps you can take to reduce risk of fires reaching your home can be found here.