



Public Health Division

County of Santa Cruz

HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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Press Release

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PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM WILDFIRE SMOKE

Smoke from the CZU August Lightning Complex wildfires continue to impact air quality. The concentration of smoke has reached “very unhealthy” and “hazardous” categories at the monitoring stations in Santa Cruz County of the Air Quality Index (AQI). Everyone should take steps to reduce their exposure when particle pollution levels are in this range. Most importantly, please stay indoors in a room in a room or building with filtered air and reduce your activity levels. These are the best ways to reduce the amount of particle pollution you breathe into your lungs.

People most at risk from particle pollution exposure include those with heart or lung disease (including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease-COPD), older adults, and children. Research indicates that pregnant women, newborns, and people with certain health conditions, such as obesity or diabetes, also may be more susceptible to particulate matter (PM)-related effects.

If you are in an at-risk group, don’t wait until pollution reaches the “hazardous” category to take action to reduce your exposure. Air quality is unhealthy for you when particle pollution levels reach the “unhealthy for sensitive groups” range, so you will need to take steps to reduce your exposure earlier and more often. If you are healthy, begin taking steps when air pollution reaches the “unhealthy” category.

Current air quality conditions can be at <http://air.mbard.org> for air quality levels. Find the closest monitoring site to your location on the air quality monitoring map. The AQI at the monitoring site will give you an indication of the air quality in your area. Keep in mind that these monitors average smoke concentrations over 24-hours, so the current smoke levels in your area may be different. Also, depending on numerous factors, such as wind speed and direction and the amount material being consumed by the fire at any given moment, air quality conditions may change quickly.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SMOKE EXPOSURE AND COVID-19

People who currently have or are recovering from COVID-19 may be at increased risk of health effects from exposure to wildfire smoke due to compromised heart and/or lung function related to COVID-19.

During this pandemic people may also be concerned about confusing the symptoms of COVID-19 and wildfire smoke exposure. It is important to know the difference between symptoms from smoke exposure and COVID-19.

- Some symptoms, like dry cough, sore throat, and difficulty breathing can be caused by both wildfire smoke exposure and COVID-19.
- Learn about [symptoms of COVID-19](#). Symptoms like fever or chills, muscle or body aches, and diarrhea are not related to smoke exposure. If you have any of these symptoms, the CDC COVID-19 [Self-Checker](#) can help you determine whether you need further assessment or testing for COVID-19. If you have questions after using the CDC COVID-19 [Self-Checker](#), contact a healthcare provider.
- If you have [severe symptoms](#), like difficulty breathing or chest pain, immediately call 911 or the nearest emergency facility.

REGARDING MASKS

- COVID-19 is circulating in our community and the best way to protect yourself from the virus and poor air quality is to stay indoors. Face coverings should be worn if in proximity to others outside your household, both indoor and outdoor.
- Face coverings such as bandanas and surgical masks do not protect against wildfire smoke particles but are recommended for protection against COVID-19.
- Taking a mask on and off can cause fine particulate matter and virus particles to build up in the mask, so minimize the number of times you put on and remove your mask.

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