



## Bushfire Smoke – Vulnerable groups fact sheet

This fact sheet provides information for people who are vulnerable and at an increased risk of health impacts from bushfire smoke.

For general information, advice and ways to reduce the impact of bushfire smoke on your health, read the [General information fact sheet](#).

### Am I at increased risk or considered vulnerable?

If you have an existing breathing difficulty or reduced lung capacity, smoke exposure can sometimes make these conditions worse. Those most at risk of significant health effects of exposure to bushfire smoke include:

- people with existing heart or lung conditions, including:
  - angina
  - ischaemic heart disease
  - asthma
  - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, also called bronchitis and emphysema
- people over 65 years of age
- children 14 years and younger
- pregnant women because pregnancy reduces lung capacity
- people with diabetes
- people with respiratory infections including COVID-19.

### What are the health effects of exposure to bushfire smoke over multiple days?

For most people, short-term exposure to bushfire smoke causes mild symptoms like sore eyes, nose, and throat. If you are vulnerable, your underlying conditions might get worse because of your exposure to bushfire smoke. If you experience an increase in symptoms, speak to your medical practitioner.

Exposure to bushfire smoke over days or weeks increases the risk of illness. Australia generally has good air quality, and evidence shows that the risk of illness reduces when air quality improves, even after long periods of exposure to poor air quality. There is potentially a small increase in the risk of certain health effects after prolonged exposure. This is likely to be very low for most people.

### What can I do to prepare?

If you have concerns about how bushfire smoke may affect you, visit your medical practitioner. You can discuss your health needs and strategies to implement during a smoke event.

Update your health management plan, or if you don't have one, discuss with your medical practitioner whether one should be developed for you.

Make sure that you have enough of your prescription medications at hand.

## What can I do during a bushfire smoke event?

Regularly monitor air quality for your local area if there is a bushfire event. You can do this by visiting the relevant website for each state and territory. Please see the [Bushfire Smoke - General Information fact sheet](#) for more details.

Review your personal health management plan and follow the steps which you and your medical practitioner discussed. These will be specific to your particular health needs.

If you are experiencing any health issues, you should seek medical attention.

If you need emergency assistance, ring triple zero (000).

## Should I buy and wear a P2/N95 mask?

Children under the age of 2 should not wear face coverings. Anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, incapacitated, or may not be able to remove the face covering without help should not wear one.

Some vulnerable people will benefit from wearing P2/N95 face coverings, including those with significant health issues. Please note, P2/N95 face coverings may be referred to as 'masks' or 'respirators'.

The recommendation is for you to talk to your medical practitioner about your personal health needs.

If your state or territory has issued specific advice on wearing masks because of COVID-19, then they must be worn. This is regardless of air quality advice.

The use of P2/N95 face coverings because of bushfire smoke should be limited to:

- vulnerable people including those with significant health issues
- people whose only option is to work outside
- people returning to their properties in burned areas.

If you would like more information on the use of P2/N95 face coverings, please see the fact sheet available on the Department of Health's [website](#).

## Where can I find more information?

For more information on ways to reduce your exposure to bushfire smoke, or other general information, refer to the [Bushfire Smoke - General information fact sheet](#).

If you would like to know more about the response to COVID-19, please go to the Department of Health's COVID-19 [health alert page](#). Your state or territory website or the relevant state or territory health department will provide location-specific advice.

**If you need emergency assistance, ring triple zero (000).**

*This document is current as of December 2020 and does not account for updated advice since this date.*

Department of Health – Bushfire Smoke – Vulnerable Groups