



Clallam County Department of Health and Human Services

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PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

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Poor Air Quality in Clallam County

CLALLAM COUNTY, WA—

Wildfire smoke from Eastern Washington has blown into the area. Wildfire smoke can be unhealthy to breathe, especially for vulnerable people such as those with existing heart or lung disease, children, older adults, and pregnant women. Some of these groups are also those most at risk for COVID-19. Persons with, or recovering from, COVID-19 may be more at risk for negative health effects from wildfire smoke exposure because of compromised lung and heart function.

Seek medical attention when experiencing severe symptoms, such as chest pain or difficulty breathing, during wildfire smoke events. If you have a fever, cough, or shortness of breath, it is best to treat it like it could be COVID-19. Protect others by staying home. If you are concerned about your health, call your health care provider to discuss COVID-19 testing and other possible reasons for your illness. Always pay attention to how the smoke is making you feel and check with your doctor right away for help managing symptoms or any specific concerns.

The Washington State Department of Health offers detailed information on how residents can best deal with smoke impacts on their homes and communities, [Smoke From Fires : Washington State Department of Health](#) . Additional information on wildfires and the latest information, monitoring and forecasting is available at <http://wasmoke.blogspot.com/>.

Stay indoors and keep indoor air clean

When the air quality is poor from wildfire smoke, reduce outdoor physical activity. As the air quality worsens you will need to go indoors and take additional steps to keep smoke out of your home to improve indoor air quality. Additional COVID-19 Guidance: With additional limitations this year, this will be the best way to protect yourself from exposure to wildfire smoke.

Reduce intake of smoke into your home

To keep indoor air clean and wildfire smoke from entering your home:

- Close windows and doors when it is smoky outside. Track the air quality and open your windows for fresh air when the air quality improves.
- Pay attention to heat and take steps to keep it cool indoors by closing curtains during daylight, using an air conditioner or fans. If it's still too hot, open windows to avoid heat exhaustion and other heat illnesses.
- Set air conditioners on recirculate to prevent intake of outside air.
- Turn off fans that vent to the outside, like the one in your bathroom. Exhaust fans pull outside air in through cracks around windows and doors.

Additional COVID-19 Guidance: Opening your windows for fresh air when the air quality improves will also help reduce the viral load of SARS CoV-2 in the air, but this alone is not enough to protect you from COVID-19. Continue with best practices for COVID-19.

Avoid activities that create indoor air pollution

Do not add to indoor air pollution during wildfire smoke events. Avoid the following activities: burning candles or incense, smoking cigarettes, broiling or frying food, and vacuuming (unless your vacuum has a HEPA filter).

Improve indoor air filtration

There are three ways to improve indoor air filtration of smoke particles in your home: 1) increase heating, ventilation, and/or air conditioning (HVAC) filtration, 2) use a portable air cleaner with HEPA filter, and 3) use a DIY box fan filter. There are different considerations with each of these options:

1. Increase HVAC filtration

Filtration of air in your home will improve the air quality inside your home during wildfire smoke events. The HVAC system is the best way to reduce fine particles (PM2.5) from wildfire smoke throughout your home, rather than only a single room.

2. Use a portable air cleaner with a HEPA filter

Improving filtration of air in your home will improve your indoor air quality during wildfire smoke events. Using a portable air cleaner with a HEPA filter can reduce fine particles (PM2.5) from wildfire smoke in a single room.

3. Use a DIY box fan filter

Improving filtration of air in your home will improve your indoor air quality during wildfire smoke events. Making your own box fan filters can be a less expensive option to reduce fine particles (PM2.5) from wildfire smoke in a single room. When building your own box fan filter it is important to understand their limitations and the potential risks. For about \$40-\$50 you can build an air filter by attaching a 20"x20" furnace filter to a 20" box fan (don't run this unattended or at night). See instructions [DIY Air Filter](#).

Seeking Cleaner & Cooler Air Elsewhere

Going to clean air shelters and public clean air spaces or a friend's or relative's place with a dedicated clean air space and air conditioning can provide relief from wildfire smoke and heat when you cannot keep your indoor air clean or you cannot keep your house cool.

Additional COVID-19 Guidance: It might not be safe for people to go to public spaces to seek cleaner and cooler indoor air away from home this year due to COVID-19. With the congregation of people at these settings, there is a risk of transmission of SARS CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Check in advance to see if these places are open and be prepared for lower capacity, to physically distance, and wear a cloth face covering.

If you decide to leave the area and visit friends or relatives, consider COVID-19 restrictions in the county you are traveling to and with the people you are visiting. Please follow current guidance for indoor gathering size etc.

Face masks are not typically recommended as the best option to the general public to reduce exposure to wildfire smoke, as it is better to stay indoors and keep indoor air clean. While N95 and other NIOSH approved respirators are in short supply due to COVID-19, they need to be reserved for those required to wear them for work. Cloth face coverings generally do not provide much protection from breathing in wildfire smoke. However, it is important to continue to wear cloth face coverings to slow the spread of SARS-Cov-2 and reduce the risk of COVID-19.

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