

## Wildfires and Your Health

Every year in British Columbia there are hundreds or thousands of wildfires (also called forest fires). Wildfires can affect your health and safety in many ways: the smoke from wildfires can affect the quality of the air, a power outage may spoil your food or you may have to evacuate if a wildfire is close to your home. Preparing in advance for [wildfires](#) can help you keep your family safe.

The [BC Wildfire Service](#) posts information on [Current Wildfire Activity](#). You can find information on fires that pose a significant safety risk, air quality, fire danger ratings and more.

Learn what you can do to **before** an emergency or disaster such as a wildfire, and how to stay safe and healthy **during** and **after** a wildfire in your area.

### Before a Wildfire

#### Emergency Preparedness

During wildfire season roads may be closed, you may be cut off from certain supplies and services or your community may be evacuated. Learn how to prepare for an emergency and stay safe in case there is an evacuation alert or order.

- [BC Government: How to Build a Household Emergency Kit and Grab-and-Go Bag](#)
- [Government of Canada: Get Prepared](#)
- [Preparing for an Emergency: A Focus on Water and Food](#)

Emergency Planning if you have specific health conditions:

- [BC Children's Hospital: Diabetes Emergency Survival Pack](#)
- [BC Renal Agency: Emergency Preparedness](#)

For information about protecting your community from wildfire, visit [FireSmart Canada, Protecting Your Community from Wildfire](#).

### During a Wildfire

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#### Wildfires

The smoke may or may not affect you. Each person's response to the smoke depends on their age, health, age and exposure. According to BCCDC (2019), common symptoms include eye irritation, runny nose, sore throat, mild cough, phlegm production, wheezing or headaches. These symptoms may be managed without seeking medical attention.

If symptoms do not improve after taking action to reduce exposure, speak with a medical professional. Find information about wildfires in B.C., including where they are and what to do if you are evacuated, below:

- [Active Wildfires Interactive Map](#)
- [Information for Residents and Evacuees Affected by Wildfire](#)

Some health authorities in B.C. provide local information on wildfires:

- [First Nations Health Authority – Wildfire Information](#)
  - [Island Health – Wildfires](#)
  - [Interior Health – Wildfire Events](#)
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## Evacuation Information

If you are under an evacuation order or affected by fire, please contact your local government to receive emergency support services. To find the Emergency Program Coordinator for your community visit the [Civic Info BC Directory](#).

If there is a wildfire in or near your community, you may be evacuated to a safer area. Wildfires can impact evacuation routes. Visit [DriveBC](#) for the latest updates on driving conditions in your community.

Seniors may need special support in the event of an evacuation. Learn what you can do to be prepared.

- [Caring for Seniors in Residential Care in an Emergency](#) (HealthLinkBC File #103c)
  - [Community Evacuation Information for Seniors](#) (HealthLinkBC File #103a)
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## Health Care for Evacuees

The smoke particles can irritate the airway. If you have a history of asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD), lung cancer or heart problems, you should monitor your symptoms. Sometimes the smoky air can increase the risk of some infections for children, infants, the elderly, those who are pregnant, and those with chronic illness.

It is recommended to seek medical attention promptly if you do experience more severe symptoms such as shortness of breath, severe cough, dizziness, chest pain or heart palpitations.

For non-emergency health information or advice, call **8-1-1** to speak with a [health services navigator](#). The navigator will help you find the information you are looking for or connect you with a [registered nurse](#), [registered dietitian](#), [qualified exercise professional](#) or a [pharmacist](#).

## Prescription Medications

During a state of emergency, pharmacists can provide a drug without a prescription to ensure the health and safety of the public. For more information visit the [College of Pharmacists of British Columbia – Providing Continuity of Care for Patients during a State of Emergency](#).

## Walk-in Clinics

To find a walk-in clinic in your area, search the [HealthLink BC Directory](#) or call **8-1-1** to speak with a health services navigator any time of the day, every day of the year.

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## Air Quality

If there is an [air quality advisory](#) in your area, and you find it is hard to breath or you are wheezing, seek medical attention right away.

Poor air quality can be harmful to your health, especially for children, older adults, and those with heart and lung conditions. For more information about air quality, including current air quality advisories, click on the links below.

- [BC Air Quality](#)
  - [Air Quality Advisories](#)
- [Government of Canada — Air Quality](#)
- [Particulate Matter and Outdoor Air Pollution](#) (HealthLinkBC File #65e)
- [Wildfire Smoke and Your Health](#)

For air quality information from your health authority, click on the links below.

- [Fraser Health — Air Quality](#)
- [Interior Health — Air Quality](#)
- [Island Health — Air Quality](#)
- [Northern Health — Air Quality: reducing your exposure in smoky conditions](#)
- [Vancouver Coastal Health — Air Quality](#)

## Staying Cool Indoors during an Air Quality Advisory

When there is an air quality advisory in your area, officials may recommend that you keep your windows closed with the air conditioner on (if you have one). Or, they may tell you to keep your windows closed with the air conditioner off. When your windows are closed and the air conditioner is off (or you don't have one), you will need to take special care to stay cool. Make sure to stay up to date on the specific recommendations for your area. Visit [BC Air Quality — Advisories](#) for current information. For more information on how to stay cool indoors, see our [Beat the Heat](#) Health Feature.

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## Dealing with Stress and Trauma

Disasters, such as wildfires, can impact your emotional health as much as your physical health. Learn what you can do to recognize signs of stress or trauma in yourself and your family.

- [BC Children's Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre](#) (PDF 450 KB)
- [Recognizing and Resolving Trauma in Children During Disasters](#)
- [Signs of Stress](#)
- [Stress Management](#)
- [Stress in Children and Teenagers](#)

- [Stress Management: Helping Your Child With Stress](#)
- [Talk in Tough Times: Support for those affected by the 2017 BC wildfires](#)

## After a Wildfire

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### Returning Home

When your local or First Nations government has declared it is safe for you to return home, there are steps you can take to make the transition easier and safer.

- [Returning Home After a Wildfire](#)
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### Food Safety and Water Quality

If there is a wildfire in your area, the power might go out in your community. Fire retardants may be used in or near your community to reduce the size and lessen the impact of the fires. Find out how to protect water supplies and food affected by fire retardants or power outages.

- [Disinfecting Drinking Water](#) (HealthLinkBC File #49b)
- [Fire Retardants: Recommended Precautions for Water and Food](#)
- [Power Outages at Food Facilities](#)
- [Water and Food Quality: Information for Evacuees Returning after a Fire](#)
- [Wildfire: Its Effects on Drinking Water Quality](#) (HealthLinkBC File #49f)

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