



Smoke and COVID-19 Safety

There is an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in New Mexico, and when wildfire season is underway New Mexicans should take more measures to protect their health. Wildfire smoke is a complex mixture of air pollutants that can harm your health and may alter immune function that makes it harder to fight COVID-19 and other respiratory infections. These are tips from the [New Mexico Department of Health's Environmental Public Health Tracking Program](#):

Find cleaner air during the COVID-19 pandemic

The best way to protect against the potentially harmful effects of wildfire smoke is to reduce exposure by staying indoors and creating cleaner air spaces. You can create a cleaner air space at home to protect yourself from wildfire smoke during the COVID-19 pandemic by following the tips on the Indoor Air Quality page <https://nmtracking.doh.nm.gov/environment/air/IndoorQuality.html>.

Take action to stay healthy if it gets smoky



Learn how to use the **5-3-1 Visibility Method** at <https://nmtracking.doh.nm.gov/environment/air/FireAndSmoke.html> to assess air quality

conditions in your area and to determine when you should be indoors.

- Limit outdoor exercise when it is smoky outside or choose lower-intensity activities.
- If you have a chronic health condition, work with your healthcare providers to create a management plan for smoky conditions. If you use rescue medications, make sure that you always have an ample supply with you.

Use adequate filtration on your HVAC system or consider purchasing a portable air filter. Swamp coolers which draw in air from the outside are NOT recommended. See "*What else can you do to protect yourself on smoky days*" at <https://nmtracking.doh.nm.gov/environment/air/FireAndSmoke.html> for more recommendations.

Whenever possible, use air conditioners, heat pumps, fans, and window shades to keep your cleaner air space comfortably cool on hot days. Get tips for staying cool at: <https://nmtracking.doh.nm.gov/health/climate/HeatIllness.html>.

- **Masks:** Cloth masks do not provide adequate protection from wildfire smoke but are recommended to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Although some face masks can provide protection from wildfire smoke, medical masks and N95 respirators MUST be reserved for frontline healthcare workers during the pandemic. If you must be away from your home during the pandemic and during a wildfire, you should wear a cloth mask when you are around others and you should limit your time outdoors, using the 5-3-1 visibility method as a guide.

Precautions and Symptoms

- Exposure to wildfire smoke and COVID-19 can both cause respiratory symptoms such as a dry cough, sore throat, or difficulty breathing. COVID-19 is typically accompanied by a fever during early phases of the infection.

Smoke from wildfires may cause people to have more severe reactions if they are infected with COVID-19. These people should take precautions and limit time outdoors: those who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or another respiratory infection, even after symptoms have resolved; those who have pre-existing respiratory conditions such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), interstitial lung disease (ILD), or lung cancer; and, anyone at increased risk for COVID-19 infection. See <https://cv.nmhealth.org/> for guidance.

- If you have severe symptoms such as difficulty breathing or chest pain, call 911 right away or get to an Emergency Department. If you have mild symptoms, call your healthcare provider. If your symptoms are accompanied by a fever, take precautions to avoid potential infection spread and get tested for COVID-19.

Learn more: <https://nmtracking.doh.nm.gov/environment/air/FireAndSmoke.html>