

Wildfire smoke and pregnancy

Exposure to wildfire smoke during pregnancy can affect the health of you and your unborn child. Growing evidence shows a link between wildfire smoke and negative health outcomes such as gestational diabetes and low birth weight. More research is still needed to fully understand the health impacts. **As a precaution, those who are pregnant should consider taking extra steps to reduce their exposure to wildfire smoke where possible.**



Wildfire smoke can affect your health

- The very small particles in wildfire smoke can travel deep into your lungs, where they can cause inflammation that can impact your whole body.
- Wildfire smoke exposure often causes mild symptoms such as eye irritation, runny nose, or headaches.
- Wildfire smoke can worsen existing heart and lung conditions, and diabetes.
- Wildfire smoke can also cause more severe symptoms, including wheezing, shortness of breath, severe cough, dizziness, chest pain, and uncomfortable or unusual heartbeat. Seek medical attention if you experience these symptoms.
- Disruptions caused by wildfires and smoke can lead to emotional stress and anxiety.



Wildfire smoke poses more health risks during pregnancy

- For those who are pregnant, wildfire smoke exposure has been linked with:
 - Increased risk of developing conditions such as gestational diabetes
 - Increased emergency room and hospital visits
- For the unborn child, wildfire smoke exposure has been linked with:
 - Increased risk of preterm birth
 - Lower birth weight
 - Impaired lung development
 - Increased respiratory illness in early life
 - Birth defects, such as cleft lip

- ▶ **If you have concerns about your health while pregnant, contact 8-1-1, HealthLink BC or your primary health care provider.**
- ▶ **If you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, reach out. HealthLink BC has resources on finding mental health services.**
- ▶ **If you experience severe symptoms from wildfire smoke exposure or need immediate medical attention for your pregnancy, call 9-1-1 or go to the emergency department if it is safe to travel.**



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

FOR MORE INFORMATION: bccdc.ca/wildfiresmoke

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR UNBORN CHILD FROM WILDFIRE SMOKE?

1 Keep the air inside your home clean and cool

- Keep windows and doors closed as long as it does not make your home too hot. For most people, including those who are pregnant, **heat is a bigger health risk than wildfire smoke.**
- Use a portable air cleaner with a HEPA filter indoors. <https://u.nu/eerMF>
- If a portable air cleaner is not an option, you can make a box fan air filter. <https://u.nu/QxeBd>
- If you have a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system in your home, talk to your service provider or building manager about what changes can be made to reduce the amount of smoke indoors.
- If you cannot clean and cool the air in your whole home, focus on one room where you spend a lot of time, such as a bedroom.
- Reduce other sources of air pollution at home, such as smoking, vacuuming, and burning incense and candles.
- If you cannot keep indoor air clean and cool at home, spend time in public spaces, such as libraries, community centers, office buildings, and shopping malls, which tend to have cleaner and cooler indoor air. Consider staying with family or friends who have clean and cool air spaces at home, if possible.

2 Take precautions to reduce exposure outdoors

- Monitor the air quality in your area and go outside when it is less smoky. <https://rb.gy/a6o27>
- Take it easy outdoors and avoid physical exertion – the harder you breathe, the more smoke you inhale. <https://u.nu/RMwZk>
- Drink plenty of water to keep hydrated and reduce inflammation.
- A well-fitted respirator or mask can reduce exposure outdoors, but it may make breathing more difficult. Talk to your health care providers before using masks for wildfire smoke. <https://u.nu/nRbAk>

3 Care for your health during smoke events

- It is important to continue regular check-ups and other prenatal care during smoke events.
- Talk to your health care providers to plan for emergencies.
 - Know the signs of labour and early labour. Monitor fetal movement/kick counts.
 - Keep a packed bag ready with essential items and supplies for both yourself and your baby.
 - Talk to your care team if you live in an area with high wildfire activity and risk of evacuation.



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness



Interior Health



Fraser Health



Island Health



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

LAST UPDATED JULY 2023

FOR MORE INFORMATION: bccdc.ca/wildfiresmoke