

# TALKING POINTS FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

## LA County Fires

### Key Messaging

- According to the South Coast Air Quality Management District, potential direct smoke impact from the Palisades, Eaton, and Hurst Wildfires burning has caused unhealthy air quality in Los Angeles County.
- Public Health urges everyone to take important steps to protect themselves and their families:
  - If you see or smell smoke limit your exposure by remaining indoors with windows and doors closed or seeking alternate shelter.
  - Avoid vigorous physical activity indoors and outdoors.
  - Keep indoor air clean by closing windows and doors. Run your air conditioning and/or an air purifier and check filters regularly. Avoid air conditioners that only bring in outside air and don't recirculate.
  - Avoid using fireplaces, candles, or vacuums. Clean dusty surfaces with a damp cloth and don't smoke.
  - Wear an N95 or P100 mask if you must go outside in smoky conditions for long periods of time in areas with heavy smoke or where ash is present.
  - **Reduce smoke in your car** by closing the windows and vents. Turn on the air conditioning and set it to "recirculate" to keep outdoor smoke from getting into the car.
  - If you experience symptoms like severe coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing, chest pain, palpitations, nausea, or unusual fatigue, contact your doctor or go to urgent care. For life-threatening symptoms, call 911.
- Residents should take precautions when **cleaning up after a fire**. Ash particles are usually bigger than smoke particles but can still cause health problems. People with heart or lung diseases, older adults, children, and pregnant women should use special caution around ash.
  - Do not return home until you are told it is safe to do so.
  - If you have children, leave them with a relative or friend while you clean after the fire. The site may be unsafe for children, and seeing the damage may upset them and cause long-term effects, including nightmares.
  - Wear gloves, long-sleeved shirts, long pants, shoes and socks to avoid skin contact. If you get any ash on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible.

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- Wear personal protective gear, such as a dust mask (preferably an N95 mask), to avoid breathing in ash and other airborne particles.
- Ventilate the area (open windows, etc.) to remove soot and odor and remove burned debris to reduce odors.
- Try not to get ash into the air. Do not use leaf blowers or other actions that will put ash into the air. Gentle sweeping of indoor and outdoor surfaces, followed by wet mopping, is the best way to clean an area with ash.
- Mist lightly with water and then sweep gently with a broom or wet mop. Direct ash-filled water to ground areas and away from the storm drains. Don't use leaf blowers!
- Collect ash into a plastic bag and dispose in the regular trash.
- Inside your home, use a vacuum with a HEPA filter or, if possible, similar industrial ones with disposable collection filter bags. Misting lightly with water and then sweeping gently with a broom is another option.

#### **Wildfire, Air Quality and Reducing Health Impacts:**

- According to the South Coast Air Quality Management District, potential direct smoke impact from the Palisades, Eaton, and Hurst Wildfires burning has caused unhealthy air quality in Los Angeles County.
- AQMD has issued a Wildfire Smoke Advisory which is in effect through January 11.
- Smoke from the multiple fires is expected to most heavily impact northwest coastal Los Angeles County including Pacific Palisades, the area of Altadena and Pasadena, near San Fernando, respectively, and areas near the fire.
- Wildfire smoke is a mixture of small particles, gases and water vapor. You can be exposed to and breathe in smoke without even seeing or smelling it.
- Exposure to smoke can result in immediate health impacts for anyone. Health impacts can range in severity from irritation to your eyes, nose, and throat to more severe issues like asthma attacks and chest pain. It can even lead to premature death.
- People at higher risk, children, the elderly, those with respiratory or heart conditions, and people with compromised immune systems, may experience more severe effects such as difficulty

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breathing, wheezing, coughing, fatigue, and/or chest pain.

- It is important for everyone to stay aware of the air quality in your area, make plans, and take action to protect your health and your family's health. To stay updated with real-time/forecasted Air Quality in your area, download the South Coast AQMD Mobile App: <http://www.aqmd.gov/mobileapp> (Also available in Spanish!) or visit <https://www.aqmd.gov/home/air-quality/air-quality-forecasts>.
- Smoke and ash can harm everyone, even those who are healthy. However, people at higher risk include children, older adults, pregnant individuals, and those with heart or lung conditions or weakened immune systems.
- Public Health urges everyone in areas where there is visible smoke or the smell of smoke or unhealthy air quality to avoid unnecessary outdoor exposure and to limit physical exertion (whether indoor or outdoor), such as exercise.
- Keep windows and doors closed whenever there is smoke outside.
- Set your AC to "recirculate" and run it to prevent outdoor smoke from getting indoors. Close any vents that pull air from the outside into your home, so turn off fresh air intake settings. Check if the AC has a clean filter. If it looks dirty, replace it.
- Avoid intense physical activity outside and wait until air quality improves.
- Avoid activities that can worsen indoor air like:
  - Smoking
  - Lighting a fireplace, incense, or candles
  - vacuuming
  - Frying or broiling food
  - Using aerosol sprays like air fresheners
  - Wearing shoes inside the house
- **Reduce smoke in your car** by closing the windows and vents. Turn on the air conditioning and set it to "recirculate" to keep outdoor smoke from getting into the car.
- Children, older adults, and people who are pregnant or have other air quality sensitive conditions, such as heart disease, asthma, and other chronic respiratory diseases, should follow these recommendations and stay indoors as much as possible even in areas where smoke, soot, or ash cannot be seen or there is no smell of smoke. If your condition worsens, contact your health care provider immediately for medical advice.

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### Recommendations for Youth, School/Sports:

- Public Health advises schools and recreational programs that are in session in smoke-impacted areas to review and follow the [California Department of Education's Memo: Get Smart about Wildfire Smoke - Clear Guidelines for Schools and Wildfire Smoke](#) or the California Environmental Protection Agency's [Guidance for Schools During Wildfire Smoke Events](#), based on the air quality level in their area.
- This may include limiting or suspending outside physical activities, including physical education and after-school sports, until conditions improve.
- Non-school related sports organizations for children and adults are advised to follow the same guidance and to cancel outdoor practices and competitions in areas where there is visible smoke, soot, or ash, or where there is a smell of smoke.
- The same guidance applies to other outdoor activities, like hiking or picnicking, in affected areas.
- People can participate in indoor sports or other strenuous activity in areas with visible smoke, soot, or ash, provided the indoor location has air conditioning that does not draw air from the outside and it has closed windows and doors to protect the cleanliness of indoor air. If not, it is recommended that everyone follow the guidelines as if they were outside.

### Recommendations for Pets:

- Avoid leaving your pets outdoors, particularly at night. Pets should be brought into an indoor location, such as an enclosed garage or a house.
- If dogs or cats appear to be in respiratory distress, they should be taken to an animal hospital immediately. Symptoms of respiratory distress for dogs include panting and/or an inability to catch their breath. Symptoms for cats are less noticeable but may include panting and/or an inability to catch their breath.

### Cleaning up After a Wildfire

- Do not return home until you are told it is safe to do so. Smoke can remain in both indoor and outdoor air days after wildfires have ended so continue to check local air quality.
- Children should not do any cleanup work. Keep children away from ash. Make sure ash and debris have been removed before you bring your child back home or to school.
- To avoid skin contact, wear household dishwashing gloves, long-sleeved shirt, and long pants during clean up. If ash does get on your skin, wash off with warm water and soap as soon as possible.

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- A disposable N-95 mask or better can be worn during clean-up to avoid breathing in ash and other airborne particles. N-95 masks must be properly fitted, with no gaps around the edges. An improperly fitted mask is the same as wearing no mask at all.
- Try not to get ash into the air. **Do not use leaf blowers or other actions that will put ash into the air. Gentle sweeping of indoor and outdoor surfaces, followed by wet mopping, is the best way to clean an area with ash.**
- A solution of bleach and water may be used to disinfect an area, if desired. Read label on container for proper use.
- Wear **safety goggles** (not safety glasses) if clean-up may cause ash in the air and if using chemical cleaning solutions, to prevent splashing into the eyes.

#### Food and Water Safety after Wildfires

- Check with your local water district. Boil water notices may be in place due to fire response efforts.
- Residents in the affected areas are advised to use bottled water or boil tap water for one minute prior to its use for drinking, brushing teeth, cooking and cleaning indoor surfaces, such as countertops, stove tops, tables and sinks. Boiling the water kills bacteria and other organisms that may have been introduced to the system.
- If power (gas or electric) is unavailable, residents should use bottled water, or eight drops of household bleach to one gallon of tap water and let it sit for 30 minutes.
- If your water looks cloudy or dirty, do not drink it. When normal water service returns, flush the hot and cold-water lines until the water appears clear and the water quality returns to normal.
- The safety of food may be a problem if the power outage lasted for a long period of time. If you experience a power outage or find that your kitchen has ash, soot, dust, and other airborne particles, **avoid foodborne illness by following these recommendations:**
  - Any food or drink products with an off odor or signs of spoilage should be thrown away. Best practice is: “When in doubt, throw it out.”

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- Generally, food in the refrigerator is safe if the power was out for no more than 4 hours and the refrigerator and freezer doors were kept close. Keeping the doors to the refrigerator and freezer closed helps maintain the coldest temperatures.
- If a power outage lasts more than four hours or the refrigerator door was not kept shut, it is best to throw away perishable food items such as meat, dairy products and eggs.
- Items that have thawed in the freezer should be thrown away. Do not re-freeze thawed food. All other food items should be inspected to ensure safety.
- Plastic bottles with liquid (ex: water), that has been covered in ash should be thrown away. It is not enough to rinse off the bottle as these particles contaminate the caps, making them very difficult to decontaminate.
- Food that has not been stored in waterproof or airtight containers and has been covered with ash should be thrown away. This includes products that have been stored in cardboard or other soft packaging.
- Food stored in sealed, previously unopened glass or metal cans or jars, such as baby food, should be safe for use. Clean before opening and transfer the contents to another container before eating.
- Throw food away in trash bags and seal tightly before placing in the trash can. Double bagging is recommended to prevent fly breeding.

**For more information visit our website:** [ph.lacounty.gov](http://ph.lacounty.gov) and <https://lacounty.gov/emergency/>  
<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Wildfire/>