



DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Promoting and protecting health, well-being, self-sufficiency, and safety of all in Marin County.



PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

August 20, 2020

Benita McLarin, FACHE
DIRECTOR

Matthew Willis, MD, MPH
PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

Lisa M. Santora, MD, MPH
DEPUTY PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

3240 Kerner Boulevard
San Rafael, CA 94901
415 473 4163 T
415 473 2326 F
415 473 3232 TTY
marinhhs.org/public-health

Smoke from Bay Area Fires Affecting Marin Air Quality: Health Tips for Marin Residents

Smoke from wildfires burning around the Bay Area is impacting air quality in Marin County. [Bay Area Air Quality Management District \(BAAQMD\)](#) has issued a Spare the Air alert. The overlap of the COVID-19 pandemic with wildfire season complicates our public health response. Persons who are either susceptible to or affected by COVID-19 may have health conditions that make them even more vulnerable if exposed to wildfire smoke. These persons include:

- Those who are immunocompromised or taking drugs that suppress the immune system;
- Those who are infected or recovering from COVID-19. Because of compromised heart and lung function due to COVID-19, they may be at increased risk of health effects from exposure to wildfire smoke.

How are symptoms from wildfire smoke exposure different from symptoms of COVID-19?

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID-19 [Self-Checker](#) can help determine whether further assessment or testing for COVID-19 is needed. Contact your health care provider if you experience the following symptoms that do not improve after moving indoors or into a safe air quality environment: wheezing, palpitations, nausea, fatigue, or lightheadedness. If you are experiencing severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing or chest pain, you should seek prompt medical attention by calling 911.

For the General Public:

Please be aware that poor wildfire containment and shifting winds can drastically change air quality in a short period of time. Smoke from wildfires can affect health. The most common symptoms are eye and throat irritation, coughing, and difficulty breathing. Understand that your planning may be different this year because of the need to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

- If you are in an affected area and need to leave your home, ensure you practice physical distancing, cover your cough, clean your hands frequently, and always wear face coverings to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Evacuation shelters are being modified to allow physical distancing.
- COVID-19 is circulating in our community and the best way to protect yourself from the virus and poor air quality is to stay indoors. Face coverings should be worn outside to prevent the spread of the virus.

- Sign up to receive safety information on Nixle by texting your ZIP code to 888-777.
- Sign up for [AlertMarin](#) notifications to receive information on immediate threats to personal safety or property.
- The best way to protect against the potentially harmful effects of wildfire smoke is to reduce wildfire smoke exposure.
- Create a cleaner air space at home to protect yourself from wildfire smoke during the COVID-19 pandemic. Use air conditioners, fans, and window shades to keep your cleaner air space comfortably cool on hot days
- During periods of extreme heat, pay attention to [temperature forecasts](#) and know how to [stay safe in the heat](#). Follow PG&E tips to [conserve energy](#).
- Avoid activities that create more indoor and outdoor air pollution, such as frying foods, sweeping, vacuuming, and using gas-powered appliances.
- Limit outdoor exercise when it is smoky outside or choose lower-intensity activities to reduce smoke exposure.
- Consider leaving the area until smoke conditions improve if you experience symptoms related to smoke exposure

Get Prepared

- Give yourself more time than usual to [prepare for wildfire events](#). Home delivery is the safest choice for buying disaster supplies. If in-person shopping is your only choice, take steps to [protect your and others' health when running essential errands](#).
- When you check on neighbors and friends before evacuating, be sure to follow [social distancing](#) recommendations (staying at least 6 feet from others) and [other CDC recommendations](#) to protect yourself and others.
- If you need to go to a disaster shelter, follow CDC recommendations for staying safe and healthy in a [public disaster shelter](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Review resources at [www.readymarin.org](#) and [www.ready.gov](#)

Additional Resources

- Use the [Air Quality Index](#) (AQI) to evaluate local air quality conditions.
- Visit [airnow.gov](#) to find reliable information about wildfire smoke and air quality.
- For further information about wildfire smoke and your health, visit, <https://www.cdc.gov/air/wildfire-smoke/default.htm>.
- Visit the [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#) for more information about COVID-19.
- Follow [@MarinHHS](#) and [@MarinCountyFire](#) for updates
- For up to date information about fires in California go to: <http://www.calfire.ca.gov/>
- For up to date information about air quality in the Bay Area go to: <http://www.baaqmd.gov/> and <https://airnow.gov/>

Sincerely,

Matthew Willis, MD, MPH
Public Health Officer

Lisa M. Santora, MD, MPH
Deputy Public Health Officer