



DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

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



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## **Wildfire Smoke: School Closure Considerations for Health Officers**

The responsibility for decisions regarding school dismissal and closures generally falls upon school administrators. The follow provides guidance for Public Health officials and school leaders in navigating these choices.

Factors to consider in decisions regarding school closures include:

- There is no established cut-off level for air quality, as measured by the Air Quality Index (AQI), for school dismissals or closures. Current and forecast air quality for the Bay Area can be found at [www.baaqmd.gov](http://www.baaqmd.gov).
- There is no clear evidence that children are more safe from wildfire smoke at home than at school. Air quality in homes may be similar to that in schools.
- School settings can provide a measure of security by ensuring recommendations are being followed, where children are avoiding outdoor physical activity and are being monitored together.
- School closures and dismissals often mean a working parent must stay home, and not all families have the same ability to meet this need. Unsupervised children are less likely to follow health recommendations.
- Some students rely on meals served in schools for nutrition.
- The duration of poor air quality and wildfire events may be prolonged, and school closures may set a precedent that extends for weeks.
- Some students have longer outdoor transit times to and from school, where they may have greater exposure.
- As always, parents should navigate these choices depending on the circumstances of each child. If a school remains open, a parent can decide to keep their child home.

At school, the following measures to reduce exposure can ensure children are protected when air quality is poor:

- Outdoor activities should be limited.
- When arriving at school, students should go directly indoors.
- Windows and doors should be kept shut as much as possible.
- When air quality is the “very unhealthy” range outdoor activities should be moved indoors, cancelled or rescheduled.
- Additional recommendations for appropriate activity levels based on air quality can be found at <https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/flag/school-chart-2014.pdf>.

- Schools are encouraged to work with facilities staff to ensure that school air filtration systems are working properly
- Air conditioners should be set to re-circulate indoor air.
- Filters should be replaced prior to the fire season.
- More information on ensuring clean indoor air can be found at ([https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/wildfire\\_may2016.pdf](https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/wildfire_may2016.pdf)):

Symptoms to watch out for:

- Common symptoms include eye and throat irritation, and mild coughing.
- If symptoms occur: The student might need to take a break, do a less intense activity, stop all activity, go indoors, or use quick-relief medicine as prescribed. If symptoms don't improve, get medical help.
- Students with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and keep their quick-relief medicine close at hand.

For up to date information about fires in California go to: [www.calfire.ca.gov/](http://www.calfire.ca.gov/)

For up to date information about air quality in the Bay Area go to: [www.baaqmd.gov/](http://www.baaqmd.gov/) or [www.airnow.gov/](http://www.airnow.gov/).

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