

Cover Sheet

DATE: August 28, 2015

SUBJECT: Wildfire Smoke and Outdoor Sporting Events

INSTRUCTIONS:

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE This HAN is intended for Public Health Department use only. **Please share this HAN message with your Health Officer and your School Contacts**



For LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT reference only
DPHHS Subject Matter Resource for more information regarding this HAN, contact:
**DPHHS CDPHP
Health Improvement Section
1-406-444-9155**

**DPHHS Health Alert Hotline:
1-800-701-5769**

**DPHHS HAN Website:
www.han.mt.gov**

REMOVE THIS COVER SHEET BEFORE REDISTRIBUTING AND REPLACE IT WITH YOUR OWN

Please ensure that DPHHS is included on your HAN distribution list.

Categories of Health Alert Messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Information Service: passes along low level priority messages that do not fit other HAN categories and are for informational purposes only.

Please update your HAN contact information on the [Montana Public Health Directory](#)

DPHHS HAN

Information Sheet

Date: August 28, 2015

Subject: Wildfire Smoke and Outdoor Sporting Events

Background: There are currently 30 wildfires in the state of Montana. Also, smoke from several wildfires in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon are impacting many communities across the state. Several organizations and schools are concerned about air quality during sporting events across the state.

Information: County and tribal air quality is posted on the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) webpage (link is below). Please visit this page for your jurisdictions air quality report. This information is updated twice daily.

Recommendations: Weather changes may make some of the information on the DEQ webpage outdated. Use the *Decision Making Recommendations during Wildfire Season for Outdoor Sporting Events Based on Visibility and Air Quality* document to verify DEQ smoke report accuracy.

Resources:

- Up to Date Air Quality Information from DEQ:
<http://svc.mt.gov/deq/todaysair/>
- Wildfire Smoke and your Health DPHHS Talking Points (brief):
<http://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/publichealth/ChronicDisease/Wildfire%20and%20Health-%20Talking%20Points.pdf>
- Public Health Wildfire Communication Toolkit:
<http://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/publichealth/ChronicDisease/Wildfire%20Public%20Health%20Messaging%20Toolkit.pdf>
- Recommendations for Outdoor Sporting Events:
<http://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/publichealth/documents/Asthma/Wildfire%20Recommendations-Outdoor%20Sporting%20Events.pdf>
- CDC Protect Yourself from Wildfire Smoke:
<http://www.cdc.gov/features/wildfires/>

Additional Information can be found at: <http://dphhs.mt.gov/>



Decision making recommendations during wildfire season for

Outdoor Sporting Events

based on visibility and air quality

Health Effect Category*	Visibility†	Recommendation
Good	13.4 miles and up	Hold outdoor sporting events as usual. Athletes with asthma should keep rescue inhalers at hand. Athletes with other smoke related sensitivities should take precautions as symptoms dictate.
Moderate/ Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	5.1 to 13.3 miles	Hold outdoor sporting events as usual. Athletes with asthma should have rescue inhalers readily available and pretreat before exercise as directed by their healthcare provider. All athletes with respiratory illness should limit outdoor activity, monitor symptoms and reduce/cease activity if symptoms arise.
Unhealthy	2.2 to 5.0 miles	Consider postponing/delaying outdoor sporting events, especially high exertion activities like soccer and track and field. If possible, move athletic practices indoors. If event/practice is held, athletes with asthma or other respiratory illnesses are advised not to participate. All athletes should limit their outdoor activity for prolonged periods of time.
Very Unhealthy	1.3 to 2.1 miles	Consider postponing/delaying all outdoor sporting events. Move all athletic practices indoors. All athletes with asthma and other respiratory illnesses are advised to stay indoors. All others should avoid prolonged exertion outdoors.
Hazardous	1.3 miles or less	Cancel all outdoor sporting events or relocate to an indoor location. Move all athletic practices indoors.

At all times, athletes experiencing respiratory symptoms should consult their personal healthcare provider

*For more information on the health effect categories visit the “Today’s Air” website run by the Department of Environmental Quality at <http://todaysair.mt.gov>. Air monitoring stations exist in many locations throughout the state. The Today’s Air website has hourly updates on the health effect category at these sites based on measured particulate matter levels. All other locations must determine the health effect category at their location based on visibility.

† To determine visibility:

1. Face away from the sun
2. Determine the limit of your visible range by looking for targets at known distances
3. Visible range is that point at which even high contrast objects totally disappear

Use the values above to determine the local forest fire smoke category



<http://todaysair.mt.gov>



Wildfire Smoke and your Health

DPHHS Talking Points

If possible, limit your exposure to smoke.

Here are 7 tips to help you protect your health:

1. **Pay attention to local air quality reports.** Watch for news or health warnings about smoke. Pay attention to public health messages and when advised, take extra safety measures such as avoiding spending time outdoors. Go to www.todaysair.mt.gov for a link to air quality reports.
2. **Pay attention to visibility guides.** Although not every community measures the amount of particles in the air, there are guidelines to help people estimate air quality based on how far they can see. Go to www.todaysair.mt.gov for a link to visibility guides.
3. **If you are told to stay indoors, stay indoors and keep your indoor air as clean as possible.** Keep windows and doors closed unless it is very hot outside. Run an air conditioner if you have one, but keep the fresh-air intake closed and the filter clean to prevent outdoor smoke from getting inside. Seek shelter elsewhere if you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed.
4. **Do not add to indoor pollution.** When smoke levels are high, do not use anything that burns, such as candles and fireplaces. Do not vacuum, because vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home. Do not smoke tobacco or other products, because smoking puts even more pollution into the air.
5. **Follow your doctor's advice about medicines and about your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease.** Call your doctor if your symptoms worsen.
6. **Do not rely on dust masks for protection.** Surgical masks or dust masks commonly found at hardware stores trap large particles. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke. An "N95" mask, properly worn, will offer some protection. If you decide to keep a mask on hand, see the Respirator Fact Sheet provided by CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Filtering face-piece respirators and masks can make the work of breathing more difficult and can lead to increased breathing rates and heart rates. They can also contribute to heat stress. Because of this, respirator use by those with heart and respiratory diseases should only be done under a doctor's supervision. A wet towel or bandana is not recommended either. While they may stop large particles, fine ones that can still get into the lungs.
7. **Avoid smoke exposure during outdoor recreation.** Before you travel to a park or forest or outdoor event, check air quality reports for the areas you are traveling to and confirm the event has not been cancelled.

Wildfire Smoke and your Health

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *What is the health threat from wildfire smoke?*

A: Smoke from wildfires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials known as particulate matter (PM). Smoke and the PM it contains can irritate your eyes or your respiratory system and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases. How much and how long you are exposed to the smoke, as well as your age and degree of susceptibility, play a role in determining whether or not you are likely to experience smoke-related health problems. If you are experiencing serious medical problems for any reason, seek medical treatment immediately.

Q: *How can I protect myself and my family from the harmful effects of smoke?*

A: The best thing to do is to limit your exposure to the smoke. Strategies to decrease exposure to smoke include staying indoors whenever possible, using air conditioners (air conditioned homes usually have lower air exchange rates than homes that use open windows for ventilation), using mechanical air cleaners, keeping windows closed while driving in a vehicle, and minimizing other sources of air pollution such as smoking tobacco, using wood burning stoves, burning candles or incense, and vacuuming. Drinking lots of water can help keep your airways moist, which may reduce symptoms of scratchy throat and coughing.

Q: *How can I tell if the smoke is affecting me or my family?*

A: Even someone who is healthy can get sick if there is enough smoke in the air. Breathing in smoke can have immediate health effects, including: coughing, trouble breathing normally, stinging eyes, scratchy throat, runny nose, irritated sinuses, wheezing and shortness of breath, chest pain, headaches, an asthma attack, tiredness, and fast heartbeat. Older adults, pregnant women, children, and people with preexisting respiratory and heart conditions may be more likely to get sick if they breathe in wildfire smoke.

Q: *What should I do about closing up my house when it is so hot in there?*

A: If it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed and you do not have an air conditioner, seek alternative shelter by visiting family members, neighbors, or public buildings that have air conditioning. You may also spend a few hours visiting an air-conditioned location such as a mall, movie theater, or library.

Q: *Our community has an outdoor game scheduled this evening. Should we cancel it?*

A: All persons in areas affected by heavy wildfire smoke should consider limiting outdoor activity and staying indoors whenever possible to minimize exposure to the smoke. In settings of prolonged, heavy exposure to wildfire smoke, public health departments and local air quality authorities may recommend canceling such activities. Stay tuned to your local news for the latest information. Use the recommendations for [when to cancel outdoor sporting events found online](#).

To view the wildfire public health messaging toolkit in its entirety, visit todaysair.mt.gov

