

Protect yourself from bushfire smoke

Bushfires are creating smoky conditions across much of NSW that may continue for some time. Smoke can affect people's health and it is important for everyone to reduce exposure.

Check the air quality for your region and subscribe to updates using the **Air Quality Index (AQI)** (www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/air-quality/current-air-quality) then check **AQI and activity guide** (health.nsw.gov.au/aqi) for what the AQI means and what activities you can do.

Steps to decrease risk from bushfire smoke

- **Follow your doctor's advice** about medicines and your asthma management plan if you have one. Keep your medication close at hand. Consult your doctor if symptoms worsen.
- **Monitor air quality and follow health messages.** Air quality information and health messages are available at NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment - Air Quality Index (AQI) data (www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/air-quality/current-air-quality).
- **Avoid vigorous outdoor activity.**
- **Spend more time indoors.** Keep doors and windows shut to keep the smoke out. Open windows and doors whenever the smoke clears.
- **Spend time in air conditioned venues** like cinemas, libraries and shopping centres.
- **Avoid indoor sources of air pollution** like cigarettes, candles and incense sticks.

Who is at greater risk from bushfire smoke?

- **People with heart disease, or lung diseases** like asthma and emphysema.
- **Older adults**, because they are more likely to have heart or lung disease.
- **Children**, because they have developing airways and breathe more air relative to their body weight.
- **Pregnant women**, because they may be more sensitive to the effects of smoke.

Using air purifiers and face masks to reduce risk from bushfire smoke

Air purifiers or face masks can also be used to reduce exposure to smoke.

Air purifiers

Air purifiers with a high efficiency particle air (HEPA) filter are able to reduce the number of fine particles indoors. To work well, the air purifier must be matched to the size of the room it is in and the room must be well sealed.

Humidifiers, negative ion generators and odour absorbers do not remove fine particles in bushfire smoke.

Face masks

- **Surgical and cloth masks don't protect against smoke.**
- P2/N95 rated face masks can filter out the fine particles in smoke.
- Wearing a P2/N95 face mask can make it harder to breathe and increase the risk of heat-related illness.
- If you have a heart or lung condition, consult your doctor before using one.
- If you have difficulty breathing, feel dizzy, faint or have other symptoms while wearing a face mask, remove it and go to place with cleaner air quality.

How to fit a P2 mask

P2/N95 rated face masks can help filter out the fine particles in smoke. To be effective, they must be fitted according to the manufacturer's instructions and form a tight seal around the face. It can be difficult to maintain a tight seal, particularly for people with facial hair.

Why use a P2 face mask? (also called N95)

Disposable P2/N95 face masks (also known as P2/N95 respirators) are able to filter out very fine particles from the air when worn correctly. They help reduce exposure to bushfire smoke/poor air quality and associated health effects.

P2/N95 face masks are widely available from hardware stores and other safety equipment suppliers.

Putting on and checking the mask

Take time to correctly identify which size and style of mask is suitable for you. Each time a P2/N95 face mask is used it should be fit checked before entering an unsafe environment. Fit checks ensure that the mask is sealed over the bridge of the nose and mouth, and that there are no gaps in the seal between the mask and the face.

P2/N95 face masks should always be used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Procedure for putting on a P2/N95 face mask and conducting a fit check

1. Remove glasses and hats. Tie back long hair so it does not become tangled in the straps of the respiratory protection
2. Put the mask on your face, ensuring the nose piece is at the top of the mask
3. Place the two headbands or ties over the head, one above the ears and one at the base of the neck.
4. Compress the mask against the face to ensure a seal across the bridge of the nose
5. Compress the mask to ensure a seal across the cheeks and the face; and
6. Conduct a fit check: check the seal of the mask by gently inhaling. If the mask is not drawn in towards the face, or air leaks around the face seal, readjust the mask and repeat process or check for defects in the mask. If the mask still leaks you may need to try a different size or style of mask.

People with beards should shave before using a P2 mask as a good seal between the mask and the wearer's face cannot be guaranteed if they have facial hair.

Maintaining effective protection

- Change the mask when it becomes moist
- Wait until you are in place with cleaner air quality before removing the mask.