

NEWS RELEASE

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Smoke From Wildfires Spreads In Georgia *DPH Urges Precautions to Protect Health*

ATLANTA – Shifting winds are pushing smoke from several fires burning in North Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina into the state, including the metro Atlanta area. The Georgia Department of Public Health is urging people, especially individuals with chronic heart and lung diseases, to protect themselves from smoke from wildfires.

For healthy people, smoke from wildfires that contains particles from burning trees and shrubs can irritate your eyes and respiratory system. However, smoke can worsen chronic health problems such as lung disease, asthma, allergies and increased risk of heart attacks and stroke. People with existing respiratory conditions, young children and elderly people are especially susceptible to health effects from this smoke.

“We especially urge parents and caregivers to pay careful attention to children and older adults and seek medical care if needed,” said Jean O’Connor, director of Chronic Disease Prevention at the Georgia Department of Public Health. “Older adults are more susceptible to smoke because of their increased risk of heart and lung problems. Children’s airways are still developing and they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults.”

Smoke can irritate the eyes and airways, causing coughing, a scratchy throat, irritated sinuses, headaches, stinging eyes or a runny nose. People with heart disease might experience chest pain, palpitations, shortness of breath or fatigue. People with lung disease may not be able to breathe as deeply or as vigorously as usual, and they may experience symptoms such as coughing, phlegm, chest discomfort, wheezing and shortness of breath.

It’s important to limit your exposure to smoke and there are precautions you can take:

- Use common sense. If it looks and smells smoky outside limit outdoor activities; yard work, exercise, children playing.
- Pay attention to local air quality reports and news coverage related to smoke.



- Keep indoor air as clean as possible if you are advised to stay indoors. Keep windows and doors closed. 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.
- Avoid activities that increase indoor pollution. Burning candles, fireplaces, or gas stoves can increase indoor pollution. Vacuuming stirs up particles already inside your home, contributing to indoor pollution. Smoking also puts even more pollution into the air.
- Do not rely on dust masks for protection. Paper "comfort" or "dust" masks commonly found at hardware stores are designed to trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from the small particles found in wildfire smoke.
- Follow the advice of your doctor or other health care provider about medicines and about your respiratory management plan if you have asthma or another lung disease.

For more information about smoke and health go to www.cdc.gov/features/wildfires/.

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About the Georgia Department of Public Health

The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) is the lead agency in preventing disease, injury and disability; promoting health and well-being; and preparing for and responding to disasters from a health perspective. At the state level, DPH functions through numerous divisions, sections, programs and offices. Locally, DPH funds and collaborates with Georgia's 159 county health departments and 18 public health districts. DPH's main functions include: Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Maternal and Child Health, Infectious Disease and Immunization, Environmental Health, Epidemiology, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Emergency Medical Services, Pharmacy, Nursing, Volunteer Health Care, the Office of Health Equity, Vital Records, and the Georgia Public Health Laboratory. For more information about DPH, visit dph.ga.gov.