

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release: June 7, 2023

Smoke from Forest Fires Affects Air Quality in Health Unit District

NORTH BAY, ON – As smoke from forest fires in Quebec and Ontario continue to affect the air quality across the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (Health Unit) region, the Health Unit is reminding people to take precautions. At the time of writing, North Bay and Parry Sound areas are at a moderate risk with the risk level expected to reach high later today and into Thursday, according to the provincial [Air Quality Health Index](#).

“Poor air quality can cause health problems and be particularly harmful to children, seniors, pregnant people and people with lung and/or heart conditions,” says Robert A-Muhong, Manager of Environmental Health. “We recommend people check the Air Quality Health Index through the [Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks](#) website, or on your local radio or TV stations, to be aware of the degree of risk.”

The Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks has a network of 39 outside air monitoring stations across the province that collect real-time air pollution data. This information is available to the public through Ontario’s Air Quality Health Index and gives an hourly snapshot of the air quality in the area.

To protect yourself and minimize the health effects of air pollutants such as forest fire smoke, the Health Unit recommends the following, especially when the Air Quality Health Index is high:

- Avoid spending prolonged time outdoors. If you must spend time outdoors, a well-fitted respirator type mask (such as a NIOSH certified N95 or equivalent respirator) that does not allow air to pass through small openings between the mask and face, can help reduce your exposure to the fine particles in smoke. These fine particles generally pose the greatest risk to health. However, respirators do not reduce exposure to the gases in wildfire smoke. It is important to listen to your body and reduce or stop activities if you are experiencing symptoms.
- If forest fire smoke is affecting your breathing or making you uncomfortable in other ways, move to a less smoky area. This may include going indoors or simply moving to an outdoor area with increased clean airflow.
- Homes can get hot with the windows closed. If you do go indoors to get out of the smoke, be sure that the temperature indoors does not create additional problems for you. Use air conditioning or a fan, if available, and be sure to drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- If you have an HVAC system in your home, use the highest rated MERV filter for your system (ideally rated 13 or higher) and set the fan to recirculate air constantly. You can also use a portable High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) air cleaner. Keep your doors and windows closed if the temperature in your home is comfortable.

- Use air conditioning in cars and keep windows closed. Remember, vehicles should never be left running in an enclosed space like a garage.
- Avoid using smoke-producing appliances such as wood stoves, candles and incense.
- Do not smoke or vape tobacco inside – smoking and vaping puts added stress on your lungs and those around you.
- Speak with your health care provider. People with lung disease (such as asthma) or heart disease, older adults, children, pregnant people, and people who work outdoors are at higher risk of experiencing health effects caused by wildfire smoke. Speak with your health care provider about developing a management plan for wildfire smoke events and maintaining a supply of necessary medications at home and always carrying these medications with you during wildfire season.

For more information on forest fire smoke and your health, contact the Health Unit at [1-800-563-2808](tel:1-800-563-2808) or visit www.myhealthunit.ca/air.

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