

# Using a respirator mask during wildfire smoke events

Wildfire smoke is a mix of gases, particles and water vapour. Fine particles represent the main health risk from wildfire smoke. These particles aren't visible to the human eye. They can get deep into your lungs and bloodstream and have been linked to a **wide range of health effects**.

It's important to check your **local air quality conditions** during smoke events. During heavy smoke conditions, everyone is at risk of the health effects of wildfire smoke regardless of their age or health. The best way to protect your health is to reduce your exposure to wildfire smoke. This is especially important if you are at **higher risk of the health effects of wildfire smoke**.

Wearing a respirator mask (like an N95) is 1 of the things you can do to **reduce your exposure and risks from wildfire smoke**, as well as:

- limiting time outdoors
- protecting your indoor air

A well-fitting and properly worn NIOSH-certified N95 or equivalent respirator (KN95 or KF94) mask can help reduce your exposure to fine particles if you must spend time outdoors. It doesn't protect against the gases in smoke.

## About respirator masks

An N95 or equivalent respirator is a special type of mask that is:

- designed to fit snugly around your face, covering your nose, mouth and chin
- made of materials that will filter out the fine particles in wildfire smoke

A respirator is different from a cloth, medical or surgical mask. These other masks don't fit the face well and the materials may not be effective filters against wildfire smoke. A scarf, bandana, neck gaiter or face shield won't protect you against wildfire smoke.



## How to fit a respirator mask

It's important to make sure your respirator mask is well-fitting and properly worn to provide some level of protection against wildfire smoke.

- Choose a size and shape that properly fits your face.
- Choose a respirator mask that fully covers your nose, mouth and chin.
- Check for gaps between your face and your respirator.
  - The material of the respirator mask should pull in towards your face when you inhale (breathe in).
  - Air shouldn't escape the edges when you exhale (breathe out).
- Improve the respirator fit so it's snug against your face and has no gaps.
  - Adjust the bands or ear loops.
  - Bend the nosepiece wire to fit snugly over your nose.
- Respirator masks fit best on clean shaven skin. Facial hair prevents a tight fit and decreases how well the mask works.

## Wearing a respirator mask safely

- Replace your respirator mask when it is dirty, damp or damaged.
- During extreme heat events, wearing a mask may add to heat stress in some people. Prioritize staying cool.
- Some individuals may find it difficult to tolerate mask use, particularly individuals with underlying respiratory, cardiac or other health conditions. Listen to your body.
- If you need to remove your respirator mask, try to move to an area with cleaner air before removing it.
- Don't wear a respirator mask while sleeping.
- Respirator masks shouldn't be used by:
  - children under 2 years of age
  - someone who has trouble breathing while wearing the mask
  - someone who needs help to remove it

Learn more about wildfire smoke, air quality and health at [canada.ca/wildfiresmoke](https://canada.ca/wildfiresmoke)