



## San Francisco Department of Public Health

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# Northern California Fires Affecting SF Air Quality– Health Tips for San Franciscans

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## What is the air quality?

The multiple fires currently burning in Napa, Sonoma and other northern counties are affecting our air quality and may create the potential of a health hazard, here in San Francisco. The quality of air in our area is heavily dependent on wind speed and direction. Seeing or smelling smoke, and monitoring the federal Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index is how we guide public health advice. The air quality changes daily and over the day. To get the latest data on air quality the EPA posts the **current Air Quality Index and forecasts for San Francisco** [here](#).

## What should I do?

*For the General Public:*

Smoke from wildfires and structure fires can affect health: eye and throat irritation, coughing, and difficulty breathing. Here are some things people can do to help protect themselves:

If you can see, taste, or feel smoke, you should immediately minimize outdoor activities. This is especially important if you have health concerns (for example, people with heart disease or respiratory disease like asthma), are elderly, pregnant, or have a child in your care.

Contact your health care provider if you experience the following symptoms:

- Repeated coughing
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness or pain
- Palpitations
- Nausea or unusual fatigue
- Lightheadedness

Follow these precautions to protect your health:

- Minimize outdoor activities
- Stay indoors with windows and doors closed as much as possible
- Do not run fans that bring smoky outdoor air inside
- Run your air-conditioner only if it does not bring smoke in from the outdoors
- Consider leaving the area until smoke conditions improve if you experience symptoms related to smoke exposure

The EPA has developed the general guidance on **how and when to modify outdoor activity** based on the Air Quality Index (summarized below and posted [here](#)).

Air Quality Index	What Should I Do?
Good 0-50	It's a great day to be active outside.
Moderate 51-100	<p><b>Unusually sensitive people:</b> Consider reducing prolonged or heavy exertion. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath. These are signs to take it easier.</p> <p><b>Everyone else:</b> It's a good day to be active outside.</p>
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups 101-150	<p><b>Sensitive groups:*</b> Reduce prolonged or heavy exertion. It's OK to be active outside, but take more breaks and do less intense activities. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath.</p> <p><b>People with asthma</b> should follow their asthma action plans and keep quick relief medicine handy.</p> <p><b>If you have heart disease:</b> Symptoms such as palpitations, shortness of breath, or unusual fatigue may indicate a serious problem. If you have any of these, contact your health care provider.</p>
Unhealthy 151 to 200	<p><b>Sensitive groups:*</b> Avoid prolonged or heavy exertion. Move activities indoors or reschedule to a time when the air quality is better.</p> <p><b>Everyone else:</b> Reduce prolonged or heavy exertion. Take more breaks during all outdoor activities.</p>
Very Unhealthy 201-300	<p><b>Sensitive groups:*</b> Avoid all physical activity outdoors. Move activities indoors or reschedule to a time when air quality is better.</p> <p><b>Everyone else:</b> Avoid prolonged or heavy exertion. Consider moving activities indoors or rescheduling to a time when air quality is better.</p>
Hazardous 301-500	<p><b>Everyone:</b> Avoid all physical activity outdoors.</p> <p><b>Sensitive groups:*</b> Remain indoors and keep activity levels low. Follow tips for keeping particle levels low indoors.</p>

\*Sensitive groups include people with heart or lung disease, older adults, children and teenagers.  
Source: Air Quality Guide for Particle Pollution, US Environmental Protection Agency, [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov).

People in San Francisco can seek respite at the following San Francisco Public Libraries. These locations have air filters:

- San Francisco Main Library, 100 Larkin St., 9:00 am to 8:00 pm
- Chinatown Branch Library, 1135 Powell Street, 10:00 am to 9:00 pm
- Mission Bay Branch Library, 960 Fourth Street, 10:00 am to 6:00 pm
- Glen Park Branch Library, 2825 Diamond Street, 10:00 am to 6:00 pm

*For Schools:*

When on condition red (unhealthy) or higher:

- For all outdoor activities, take more breaks and do less intense activities.
- Consider moving longer or more intense activities indoors or rescheduling them to another day or time.
- Watch for symptoms and take action as needed.
- Students with asthma should follow their asthma action plans and keep their quick-relief medicine handy.

The EPA has posted Air Quality and Outdoor Activity Guidance for Schools here: [https://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=flag\\_program.activityguid](https://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=flag_program.activityguid)

## **What should I do if I work outdoors?**

When on condition red (unhealthy) or higher:

- move work indoors, if possible
- limit exertion
- take frequent breaks
- follow EPA guidelines for air quality outlined in the table above
- consult with your employer if you have specific concerns

As long as occupational particulate standards are not exceeded (which, per Cal OSHA, is unlikely for workers not performing firefighting duties), we recommend the voluntary use of respirators (masks), for people working outside who desire them, when the air quality index reaches red or above. If people choose to wear a respirator, they should do so in accordance with state guidelines linked [here](#).

**For everyone: as always, if you or someone you know is experiencing a life-threatening emergency, call 9-1-1.**

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