

# News Release

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## **WILDFIRE AIR QUALITY ADVISORY**

**Monterey, California – October 1, 2020**

Due to smoke from Northern California wildfires, particulate matter (PM2.5) levels have reached the “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups” category at many air monitoring stations throughout Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties.

Some people are at higher risk from PM2.5 exposure. Sensitive groups include those with heart or lung disease (including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease-COPD), older adults, and children. Research indicates that pregnant women, newborns, and people with certain health conditions, such as obesity or diabetes, also may be more susceptible to PM-related effects.

It's well established that long-term exposure to air pollution [harms lung function](#) and has many [other negative health effects](#). Also, since Covid-19 is a respiratory disease, scientists expect that exposure to wildfire smoke will make people more susceptible to catching the disease and worsen health effects.

If you are in an at-risk group, if you have heart or lung disease, if you are an older adult, or if you have children, talk with your doctor in advance about when and whether you should leave the area or move to a location with better indoor air quality. When PM2.5 concentrations are high for a prolonged period of time, fine particles can build up indoors even though you may not be able to see them.

If you are in an at-risk group, don't wait until pollution reaches the “Unhealthy” category to take action to reduce your exposure. Air quality is unhealthy for you when particle pollution levels reach the “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups” range, so you will need to take steps to reduce your exposure earlier and more often.

Do not rely on dust masks for protection. Paper "comfort" or "dust" masks are designed to trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from small particles such as PM2.5. Scarves or bandanas won't help either. Disposable respirators known as N-95 or P-100 respirators may help if you have to be outdoors for a period of time. It is best to stay indoors to reduce smoke exposure so that personal protective gear is not necessary.

Please check current air quality conditions at [www.mbard.org](http://www.mbard.org) for air quality levels. Find the closest monitoring site to your location on the air quality monitoring map. The Air Quality Index (AQI) at the monitoring site will give you an indication of the air quality in your area. Keep in mind that these monitors average smoke concentrations over 24-hours, so the current smoke levels in your area may be different. Also, depending on numerous factors, such as wind speed and direction and the amount material being consumed by the fire at any given moment, air quality conditions may change quickly.

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