



"Committed to the protection and promotion of public health."

Gallatin City-County Health Department

****Health Alert Network (HAN) Message****

Message Type: Health Advisory
To: Area Health Care Providers
Date: August 30, 2017
Re: Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke and Recommendations for Outdoor Activity During Poor Air Quality Events

*****See Attached Information*****

During regular business hours contact GCCHD at 406 582-3100
During afterhours including weekends dial sheriffs dispatch at 582-2100 ext 2.

Categories of Health Alert Messages:

Health Alert	Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.
Health Advisory	Provides important information for a specific incident; may not require immediate action.
Health Update	Provides updated information regarding an incident; unlikely to require immediate action.

Information Sheet

Date: August 30, 2017

Subject: Recommendations for Outdoor Activity During Poor Air Quality Events

Background:

The Montana wildfire season grows longer each year and 2017 is no exception to this trend. In temperate conifer forests such as those in Montana, fire weather seasons have increased in length by as many as 36 days over the past 35 years. In shrublands, such as those found in parts of eastern Montana, the season length has increased by many as 42 days. Montana has been declared a state of emergency with over 16 large wildfires currently burning statewide and over 500,000 acres burned since the start of the season.

In late August and early September, school ramps up and the fall sports season begins. Although student athletes may potentially experience more exposure to unhealthy outdoor air, it is just as important to protect students in the classroom during the school day. As the wildfire season continues into September, it is crucial that schools understand the health risks involved with prolonged exposure to wildfire smoke. Healthcare providers can play an important role in educating families about how they can advocate for clean air indoor at school and health conscious decision making when it comes to cancelling outdoor activities.

Schools and childcare facilities have a responsibility to keep children safe. During wildfire season this can be especially challenging, but [support tools](#) have been developed by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, the Department of Environmental Quality, and the Office of Public Instruction.

Information: Particulate matter (also called “PM”) in wildfire smoke poses the biggest risk to the public’s health. The potential health effects vary based on the type of plants burning, atmospheric conditions and, most importantly, the size of the particles. Particles larger than 10 micrometers usually irritate only the eyes, nose and throat. Fine particles 2.5 micrometers or smaller (PM2.5) can be inhaled into the deepest part of the lungs, and may cause greater health concern. Everyone may experience symptoms due to smoky conditions, but smoke may worsen symptoms for people who have pre-existing health conditions and those who are particularly sensitive to air pollution.

Recommendations

Health Departments:

- Continue to monitor wildfire and air quality conditions and provide up to date information and resources to partner organizations and the general public.
- Be prepared to respond to inquiries from concerned citizens. Identify the person(s) responsible for responding to the public and prepare messages ahead of time.

Healthcare Providers:

- Speak with patients, especially those with lung or heart concerns, about how wildfire smoke can affect their health and the precautions they should take to stay safe.
- Direct patients to public health resources on how to stay healthy during poor air quality events. Resources can be found at dphhs.mt.gov/airquality.
- Encourage patients to check [DEQ's Today's Air website](#) for local air quality readings and activity recommendations. The local county health department may be contacted for more information.

Schools:

- Use the [Recommendations for Outdoor Activities Based on Air Quality](#) when deciding whether or not to cancel sporting events and other outdoor activities. These recommendations should be taken seriously and the health of the students involved should be the first priority when making these decisions.
- When deciding to cancel events, make the decision early to avoid unneeded travel and time waste. Ensure your notification plan within your Emergency Operation Plan is current so that if the need to cancel an event arises, all parties involved are informed of the changes per your district protocol.
- To protect all students, especially those with asthma or other chronic respiratory conditions, keep windows closed as much as possible and ensure that ventilation and air conditioning systems are set to recirculate mode. Schools that are heavily impacted by smoke should consider using [HEPA-grade air purifiers](#) to help clean the air in your classroom/facility.

Childcare Facilities:

- When air quality levels range from *Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups* to *Very Unhealthy/Hazardous*, keep children indoors as much as possible. If you must be outside, limit vigorous activity and closely monitor children with asthma. Consult the [Recommendations for Outdoor Activities Based on Air Quality](#) for more guidance.
- Keep windows closed during poor air quality days and recirculate the indoor air to prevent additional exposure to poor air quality. If you are in an area that is severely affected by wildfire smoke, consider using [HEPA-grade air purifiers](#) to help clean the air in your classroom/facility.
- Know which children in your care have asthma or other respiratory conditions. Make sure they have medication available in case of an asthma attack or other emergency.

Access to all the above links can be found at dphhs.mt.gov/airquality.



JOINT NEWS RELEASE: DPHHS AND DEQ

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 30, 2017

Contact:

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Jeni Garcin, DEQ, 406-444-6469

Public health officials: Follow recommendations for outdoor activities

HELENA – State health officials stressed today the importance of following recommendations for outdoor activities based on air quality as Montana’s unrelenting wildfire season shows no signs of letting up.

This information is especially concerning with a new school year set to begin, fall sports are ramping up at all age levels and other outdoor activities are being held.

“We are obviously facing some very unhealthy conditions right now in many areas of Montana,” said Department of Public Health and Human Services State Medical Officer Dr. Greg Holzman. “We strongly urge all Montanans to take this seriously, and follow the air quality recommendations for outdoor activities. This information is designed to provide people with the information they need to make informed decisions that will help Montanans stay healthy during this time.”

DPHHS offers several resources and recommendations the general public can follow to avoid prolonged exposure at www.dphhs.mt.gov

[The Recommendations for Outdoor Activities Based on Air Quality document is available here:](http://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/airquality)
<http://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/airquality>

The DPHHS website also includes [seven tips to help Montanans protect their health during a wildfire season](#) and a [public health wildfire communication toolkit](#).

Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) officials do not expect the conditions to improve heading into this weekend.

“Air quality impacts are not expected to improve today and tomorrow with stable air remaining in place,” said DEQ Air Quality Bureau Chief Dave Klemm.

Klemm added that fire activity is expected to remain high each day this week, causing significant impacts for west-central Montana. Smoke from the Pacific Northwest is also impacting Montana, worsening air quality in west-central Montana and causing widespread haze across the state.

On Thursday and Friday, increased winds and the chance of scattered thunderstorms will hopefully clear out some valleys but will likely increase fire behavior in Montana. There is no significant precipitation in the long term forecast, with smoke impacts expected to continue through this weekend and into next week.

Certain people are especially susceptible to the dangers of wildfire smoke, Holzman noted. This includes the elderly, infants and young children, pregnant women and people with chronic health condition especially those which involve lung or heart.

Health in the 406 messages

To keep informed about this and other public health topics, consider subscribing to DPHHS Health in the 406 messages by going to healthinthe406.mt.gov.

Health in the 406: Focus on Wildfire Conditions

- Montana has been declared a [state of emergency](#) with over 16 large wildfires currently burning statewide and over 500,000 acres burned since the start of the season. For news and up-to-date Montana wildfire information visit the [Incident Information System \(InciWeb\)](#).
- An [evacuation plan](#) for families, pets and animals can help avoid confusion and prevent injuries, especially during extreme [wildfire conditions](#).
- Take steps to [protect yourself](#) and [your family](#); be aware of [your local air quality](#) and [know your health risks](#).