Smoke and COVID-19 Safety

There is an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in New Mexico, and when wildfire season is underway New Mexicans should take more measures to protect their health. Wildfire smoke is a complex mixture of air pollutants that can harm your health and may alter immune function that makes it harder to fight COVID-19 and other respiratory infections. These are tips from the New Mexico Department of Health’s Environmental Public Health Tracking Program:

Find cleaner air during the COVID-19 pandemic
The best way to protect against the potentially harmful effects of wildfire smoke is to reduce exposure by staying indoors and creating cleaner air spaces. You can create a cleaner air space at home to protect yourself from wildfire smoke during the COVID-19 pandemic by following the tips on the Indoor Air Quality page https://NMTracking.org/environment/air/IndoorQuality.html.

Precautions and Symptoms
• Exposure to wildfire smoke and COVID-19 can both cause respiratory symptoms such as a dry cough, sore throat, or difficulty breathing. COVID-19 is typically accompanied by a fever during early phases of the infection.

Take action to stay healthy if it gets smoky

Learn how to use the 5-3-1 Visibility Method at https://NMTracking.org/fire to assess air quality conditions in your area and to determine when you should be indoors.

• Limit outdoor exercise when it is smoky outside or choose lower-intensity activities.

• If you have a chronic health condition, work with your healthcare providers to create a management plan for smoky conditions. If you use rescue medications, make sure that you always have an ample supply with you.

• Use adequate filtration on your HVAC system or consider purchasing a portable air filter. Swamp coolers which draw in air from the outside are NOT recommended. See “What else can you do to protect yourself on smoky days” at https://NMTracking.org/environment/air/FireAndSmoke.html for more recommendations.

• Whenever possible, use air conditioners, heat pumps, fans, and window shades to keep your cleaner air space comfortably cool on hot days. Get tips for staying cool at: https://NMTracking.org/health/heatstress/Heat.html.

• Masks: Cloth masks do not provide adequate protection from wildfire smoke but are recommended to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Although some face masks can provide protection from wildfire smoke, medical masks and N95 respirators MUST be reserved for frontline healthcare workers during the pandemic. If you must be away from your home during the pandemic and during a wildfire, you should wear a cloth mask when you are around others and you should limit your time outdoors, using the 5-3-1 visibility method as a guide.

Learn more: https://NMTracking.org/fire

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