



CEDARS-SINAI MEDICAL CENTER®

NEWS

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CEDARS-SINAI'S DIRECTOR OF PULMONOLOGY AND CRITICAL CARE OFFERS TIPS FOR LESSENING THE EFFECTS OF WILDFIRES' SMOKE ON THE LUNGS AND RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

LOS ANGELES (Sept. 27, 2003) – With wildfires creating a haze that covers much of the Southland, there are steps people can take to reduce the effects of the fires and resulting smoke on their lungs and respiratory systems. According to Zab Mosenifar, M.D., Director of Pulmonary and Critical Care at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, the most likely short-term effects for people living in relatively close proximity to the fires include hyper-reactivity, painful irritation of the eyes, coughing, shortness of breath, sneezing and other uncomfortable symptoms.

In some cases, especially for people who suffer from asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or other respiratory disorders, the symptoms can be more severe, even including bronchial spasms. In addition, children and senior citizens are at higher risk than the general population.

Dr. Mosenifar also points out that people who live farther away from the fires may also be at risk for long-term damage to their lungs and respiratory systems. Why? Because closer to the fire, the particles in the air tend to be larger, so they often get stopped in the nasal and respiratory passages, before they reach the lungs. Farther away from the fire, the particles tend to be smaller – even smaller than particles found in cigarette smoke – so they actually can be inhaled all the way into the lungs, causing lasting effects and damage.

“While it is important not to panic,” says Dr. Mosenifar, it’s also important to know what common-sense steps you can take to protect yourself, and when it is appropriate to seek medical attention for yourself and your family.”

He offers the following suggestions:

1. Wear a mask to help filter out the particles that you would otherwise breathe in to your respiratory passages and even your lungs.
2. Stay indoors as much as possible, and keep the windows closed.
3. If you have air conditioning in your home, use that, but remember that the increased air pollution from the wildfires may plug your air conditioner’s filters more quickly, so check them regularly and clean them as necessary.

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4. If you do not have air conditioning, close the windows and turn on the fan that is part of your furnace or heating system (don't turn on the heat, just the fan). In most cases, these fans also have filters that will help filter out the larger pollution particles in the air.
5. If you have asthma, COPD, or allergic rhinitis (which approximately half of Southern Californians have), be very vigilant with your medications. Be sure to use your nasal sprays and inhalers regularly.
6. Avoid exercise or strenuous activity – especially outdoors.
7. After the fires have been extinguished, it's important to be aware that some people – especially children – may have more respiratory symptoms than usual. Some can also develop rhinitis and asthma. Parents need to be aware of the symptoms and seek medical attention for their children as appropriate.

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is one of the largest non-profit academic medical centers in the Western United States. For the fifth straight two-year period, Cedars-Sinai has been named Southern California's gold standard in health care in an independent survey. Cedars-Sinai is internationally renowned for its diagnostic and treatment capabilities and its broad spectrum of programs and services, as well as breakthrough in biomedical research and superlative medical education. It ranks among the top 10 non-university hospitals in the nation for its research activities.

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