



**Northwestern
Health Unit**

www.nwhu.on.ca

For Immediate Release
May 6, 2016

Forest fires in region impacting air quality

Forest fire season is upon us, and smoke from forest fires in our region has begun to arrive in Northwestern Ontario communities. The health unit reminds the public and individuals most at risk of harm – children, elderly, pregnant women, people with heart or lung conditions, or persons with active and/or physical jobs – to reduce the length of time they are exposed to the forest fire smoke and the amount of air breathed in.

Forest fire smoke is made up of a mixture of gases and very small particles that can be harmful to your health. If developing a new or worsening cough, shortness of breath beyond what is usually experienced, chest pains, significant weakness or fatigue, please seek medical care as soon as possible.

Follow these tips to protect you and your family:

- If it looks smoky outside, stay inside as much as possible with your windows and doors closed. If you have room air cleaners with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, turn them on. Keep your activity level low.
- To help keep particle levels lower indoors avoid using items that 'burn', such as wood stoves and gas stoves or even candles.
- If you have an air conditioner set it to 'recirculate' and keep it running to help filter and cool the air. If you do not have air conditioning, if possible, try spending some time in an air conditioned place, such as a mall or library, to cool off.
- Avoid smoking. Smoking puts even more harmful particles in your lungs and also affects the quality of air for people around you.
- If you have asthma, use your medication as prescribed by your doctor. If you are supposed to measure your peak flows, make sure you do so. Call your doctor or nurse if your symptoms worsen.
- If you are in your car or truck, keep the windows closed and put the air system on 'recirculate'.

Smoke levels from forest fires may vary considerably due to fire conditions and wind directions. People who are at higher risk should consider taking precautions when smoke conditions are light to moderate. This is usually indicated by a smoke odour and haziness or visibility that is less than 8 km.



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People who are low-risk, or in good health, should also consider taking precautions when smoke conditions are heavy. Heavy smoke conditions exist when visibility is less than about 4 km, and is especially of concern when these conditions last for a day or more.

For more information please contact your [local health unit office](#) to speak with a Public Health Inspector.

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For more information contact:

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