



## Face Masks for Wildfire Smoke

The best way to protect your health from wildfire smoke is to seek cleaner air. Use a portable air cleaner at home, find an indoor environment with filtered air, or relocate to an area with less smoke. If you cannot access cleaner air, some face masks can provide protection from wildfire smoke. However, it is important to be aware of the limitations and potential risks.



**Well-fitted N95 respirators (N95s) offer effective protection from the fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) in wildfire smoke.**

- A good seal around the mouth and nose is the most important thing for filtration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> (see instructions on reverse). A well-fitted N95 can reduce PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations by at least 95%.
- It can be difficult to get a good seal if the N95 is the wrong size or shape for your face, especially if you have a small face or facial hair.
- Currently no N95s are made to fit children.
- Pleated surgical masks, single-strap dust masks, and poorly-fitted N95s offer only moderate protection compared with a well-fitted N95.
- Cloth masks, bandanas, and t-shirts offer no protection, whether wet or dry.



**If you chose to wear an N95 respirator, you should be aware of the limitations and potential risks.**

- It is **NOT SAFE** to wear an N95 while sleeping.
- N95s cannot protect against the gases in wildfire smoke, which may also cause irritation.
- Wearing an N95 may make breathing more difficult. **Pregnant women and people with respiratory and cardiovascular conditions should talk to their health care providers before using N95s.**
- People with limited upper body mobility may need assistance using N95s.
- N95s are uncomfortable to wear, especially when it is hot.
- The facial seal can be affected by physical activities such as bending, or lifting, and should be re-checked often.
- N95s should be replaced when saturated with sweat or water, and when visibly dirty or deformed.
- **Wearing a face mask may lead to a false sense of security** – listen to your body at all times and stop or reduce activities if you feel unwell.



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FOR MORE INFORMATION: [bccdc.ca/wildfiresmoke](https://bccdc.ca/wildfiresmoke)

**N95 respirators come in a wide range of shapes and sizes, but all MUST be labelled as N95 on the material or the straps.**



- N95s can be purchased at many hardware stores, pharmacies, and online retailers.
- Some N95s are cupped and some are packed flat. The cupped ones are easier to put on than the flat ones.
- All N95s have two straps – some go around the head and some hook behind the ears.
- Many N95s have exhaust valves that make breathing easier and reduce condensation inside the mask.
- Once you find a model that fits well, it is a good idea to buy a few replacements.

### Steps for wearing an N95 respirator properly:

Choose the right shape and size for your face. Many models come in multiple sizes, ranging from XS to XL.

If you are wearing glasses or a hat, take them off while you fit the N95.

Cup the N95 in one hand and move the straps out of the way.



Place it over your mouth and nose.



Pull the top strap over your head first and set it above your ears.



Pull the bottom strap around the back of your head and set it below your ears, then check in a mirror to ensure that the straps are properly placed.



Mold the nose piece (usually a metal strip) around the bridge of your nose with both hands to create a tight fit.



Test the N95 for leaks by covering it with both hands. When you inhale, the mask should pull in towards your face. When you exhale, you should feel no air escaping from around the edges. If air leaks in or out around the nose, re-mold the nosepiece. If air leaks in or out around the cheeks or chin, adjust the placement of the straps on your head.



If you cannot get a good seal, consider asking someone for help or finding a different mask that is better fitted to your face.

- Store your mask in a clean, sealed container with hard sides to make sure it does not get dirty or bent out of shape.
- Most N95s are disposable, but you can re-wear each mask for wildfire smoke as long as it stays clean, dry, and well-fitted. Test the seal of your mask each time you put it on.



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