



Respiratory Care WA

Asthma | COPD | Respiratory Health



08 9289 3600



36 Ord Street, West Perth, WA, 6005



respiratorycarewa.org.au

Bushfires and Asthma

Over summer in WA, bushfire smoke causes problems for many people with asthma. Wood smoke from hazard reduction burns and bush fires contain harmful gasses including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, carbon dioxide and a range of organic compounds, which can irritate sensitive airways and trigger asthma.

Hazard reduction burns are usually carried out in winter and spring. The Department of Environment and Conservation (WA) publishes 'Today's Prescribed Burns' at <http://naturebase.net/> - look for 'Fire' on the 'Management and Protection Page. Listen to your local radio station for information on fires in your area, or contact your local fire service.

Be ready for bushfire season

- Visit your doctor to update your Asthma Action Plan prior to the burn-off/bushfire season, to ensure your asthma is well managed.
- Make sure you know how to perform asthma first aid. Speak to your doctor or call Respiratory Care WA on 1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462) if you need information about this. Also, make sure that people around you are aware that you have asthma, and that they know how to help you in an emergency.
- Continue using your preventer medication as prescribed on your written Asthma Action Plan and ensure you have plenty of reliever medication with you at all times.
- Keep an extra reliever puffer with your most precious papers or photographs or evacuation kit to ensure it goes with you if you need to leave suddenly. Do not keep an inhaler in your car as extreme heat may make your medication ineffective. Some medication canisters can also explode under intense heat conditions in cars.
- Take particular caution if you care for children or elderly people with asthma they are often the first to experience breathing difficulty from smoke or particle pollution.



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How can I minimise exposure to bushfire smoke?

When there is smoke from fires in the area, unless you are advised to evacuate you should stay indoors, close all windows and doors and block all air vents and use a filtered air conditioner to circulate air. If you cannot prevent smoke or particles entering your home, consider staying at a friend's or visiting an air-conditioned shopping centre or place where you will be exposed to less smoke. Put your car air conditioner on 'recycle' to minimise smoke entering your car.

What should I do if I am exposed to bushfire smoke?

If you must go outside when there is bushfire smoke about:

- Stay low to the ground, and wear a face mask or thick cloth that firmly covers your nose and mouth to prevent breathing in a large amount of smoke.
- If you are exposed to smoke and start to experience any asthma symptoms, start asthma first aid and get medical help as soon as you can.
- Large fires may smother an area with smoke haze for days after the fire has been put out. After the fire, wear a face mask or cloth, and wet down any dry, dusty areas before doing any cleaning up. Remain aware of any asthma symptoms in the days following a fire and seek medical assistance if you find the smoke has made your asthma worse. Further information about safety in bushfires is available at www.fesa.wa.gov.au.

Bushfire volunteers and emergency personnel

Because of their long and intensive exposure to fire, heat and smoke, many volunteers working in bushfire affected regions have an increased risk of asthma attacks. If you have asthma, make sure other volunteers around you know you have asthma in case you need help, and be especially careful to make sure you have reliever medication with you at all times. Make sure you take plenty of breaks to get away from smoke and rest indoors wherever possible.



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Asthma First Aid

1



Keep calm and sit up straight

2



Have 4 doses of reliever inhaler

Use a spacer if possible, one dose into the spacer at a time, taking four breaths after each dose.

3



Wait 4 minutes

If there is no improvement, have four more separate doses of reliever inhaler as above.

4



If no improvement

call an ambulance (dial 000)

Keep giving four separate doses every four minutes until ambulance arrives