



Bushfires and asthma

Bushfires can start quickly in hot, dry and windy conditions.

In Western Australia, prescribed burns take place in winter and spring, while bushfire risk is highest from early summer to early autumn.

If you or someone you care for has asthma or another health condition, it is important to plan ahead.

Why bushfire smoke is a health risk

Smoke contains a mix of particles:

- Very small particles that travel deep into the lungs, causing inflammation and breathing difficulty.
- Larger particles that can irritate the eyes, nose, throat and upper airways.

Smoke also contains harmful gasses including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, carbon dioxide which can irritate sensitive airways and trigger asthma symptoms.

How bushfire smoke affects asthma

Bushfire smoke can affect anyone, but people with respiratory conditions including asthma can be particularly vulnerable.

Breathing in smoke can trigger asthma symptoms such as:

- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Chest tightness
- Throat irritation

People with asthma should monitor for worsening symptoms. Symptoms may last for several days after smoke exposure, even once the fire has passed.

Bushfire smoke can also increase anxiety, disrupt daily life and limit school, work, sport and social activities.

Your Asthma Action Plan can help you manage your asthma and outlines the steps to take in the event of a flare-up.



People who may be more at risk

- Children with asthma, as their airways are smaller and still developing
- Older adults, especially those with other health conditions
- Pregnant women
- People with poorly controlled asthma or other lung conditions

Stay informed

Hazard reduction burns are usually carried out in winter and spring. The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions publishes daily information about planned and current burns on their website.

Emergency WA provides up-to-date information about prescribed burns, bushfires and other hazard warnings through their website and app.

You can also tune into your local ABC or 6PR radio station for updates about fires.

Be ready

Preparing early can make a big difference.

- Review or update your Asthma Action Plan with your doctor before bushfire season
- Make sure you and your family members know how to perform Asthma First Aid
- Prepare a bushfire survival plan and emergency kit
- Take your preventer medicine every day or as prescribed
- Always carry your reliever and ensure you have enough medication to last through holiday periods
- Don't leave inhalers in the car on hot days, as heat can damage the medicine and some canisters can burst in extreme heat

If smoke is expected in your area

Bring washing indoors if smoke is forecast, as smoke particles can settle on fabrics and be carried inside.

Remember the CALM steps:

C - Close doors and windows

A - Activate your Asthma Action Plan

L - Locate your reliever medication

M - Monitor your symptoms

Use air conditioning on the recirculate setting if available.

If smoke is entering your home and symptoms worsen, consider staying with friends, visiting an air-conditioned shopping centre or another indoor space with cleaner air.



If you must go outside when there is smoke:

- Wear a well-fitting mask over your nose and mouth
- If you develop asthma symptoms, start Asthma First Aid and seek urgent medical help
- If travelling in the car, set the air conditioner to recirculate to reduce smoke entering the vehicle

Bushfire volunteers and emergency workers

People working in bushfire affected areas may have prolonged exposure to smoke and heat, which can increase the risk of asthma flare-ups. If you have asthma:

- Let your team leader or colleagues know you have asthma in case you need assistance
- Always carry your reliever with you and ensure it is easily accessible
- Take regular breaks away from smoke and rest indoors when possible

Preparing helps keep you safe

Bushfire smoke can be challenging, but planning ahead can reduce risk and stress. Knowing what to do, keeping your asthma well

How we can help

Respiratory Care WA has a team of respiratory healthcare professionals here to provide information and support for Western Australians living with asthma and COPD. We offer in-person education and support at our respiratory hubs or via telehealth. Our team can also visit schools, workplaces or community and sporting groups to deliver free asthma management sessions.

Email ask@respiratorycarewa.org.au to find out more.