

# FACE MASKS FOR WILDFIRE SMOKE



There is no safe way to breathe outdoors during a forest fire. Even if you can prevent breathing in some smoke, no mask can prevent toxic gases from the smoke from getting into your lungs.

Wearing a mask should only be used if there is absolutely no way for someone to not be outside in the smoke. The best option will always be to stay indoors out of the smoke for your health.

People with health conditions such as pregnancy, heart or lung conditions should always consult a physician about the use of masks in specific situations.

**If you absolutely must be outdoors, please follow these safety tips:**

- Use only a well fitted N95 mask with two straps and use both straps at all times for the best fit. A dust mask or surgical mask or bandana will not provide the Particulate Matter (PM) removal that is required for forest fire smoke.
- N95 must be certified by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).
- Place the mask over your nose and under your chin, with one strap placed below the ears and one strap above.
- Adjust the mask so that air cannot get through at the edges. Any leakage around the edges of the mask allows unfiltered air to enter.
- Pinch the metal part of the mask tightly over the top of your nose.
- Follow instructions on the package to check for a tight face seal.
- Masks fit best on clean-shaven skin. Masks do not work for people with beards because they will not seal.
- Masks are not approved for children or for use during sleeping.
- Throw away/replace your mask when breathing through it gets difficult, if it is damaged, wet or if the inside gets dirty.
- It is harder to breathe through a mask, so take breaks often if you work outside. If you feel dizzy or sick go to a less smoky area, take off your mask, and get medical help.
- Do not use wet masks and only use N95 designated masks!



**Do not fall into a trap of a false sense of security just because you are wearing a mask! Masking in a forest fire is a last resort. You should limit your time outdoors even if you have a proper fitting mask.**

Adapted from: [bccdc.ca/wildfire-smoke](https://bccdc.ca/wildfire-smoke) and California Department of Public Health  
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