

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

For more information, contact: *Kim Engel or Melody Leisy, 866-701-7173*

As wildfires burn in Northwest Nebraska, Panhandle residents are advised to take health precautions in regards to smoke.

Smoke from wildfires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. The smoke can hurt your eyes, irritate your respiratory system and worsen chronic heart and lung disease. Smoke can cause many symptoms:

- coughing
- scratchy throat
- irritated sinuses
- shortness of breath
- chest pain
- headaches
- stinging eyes
- runny nose
- asthma worsening

If you have heart or lung disease, smoke might make your symptoms worse, but when smoke levels are high enough, even healthy people may experience some of these symptoms. Those with heart and lung disease, such as congestive heart failure, angina, COPD, emphysema or asthma are at a higher risk, as are older adults and children.

Here are some hints to help protect yourself and your family from the smoke caused by wildfires. Limit your exposure to smoke. Stay inside and keep indoor air as clean as possible, by keeping windows and doors closed. If you do not have an air conditioner and it is too warm to stay indoors without AC, seek shelter elsewhere.

Do not add to indoor pollution, by burning candles, fireplaces or gas stoves. Follow your doctor's advice about medicine and respiratory management if you have asthma or any other lung disease. Call your doctor if symptoms worsen.

Lastly, do not rely on dust masks for protection. Paper dust masks, commonly found at hardware stores are designed to trap large particles, such as sawdust. These masks will not protect your lungs from smoke.

For additional information about the health threats from wildfire smoke, visit pphd.org, or call PPHD at 308-487-3600 or toll free at 866-701-7173. The purpose of the Panhandle Public Health District is to educate the region it serves about the prevention of epidemics, spread of contagious diseases, injury, illness and disability. The district is charged with promoting and encouraging healthy behaviors. They promote the quality and accessibility of health services and protection against environmental hazards. Through education, protection and promotion of these issues, the Panhandle Public Health District believes the quality of life of the residents they serve can be greatly improved.