

# WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT WILDFIRE SMOKE AND PREGNANCY



DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH &  
HUMAN SERVICES

## Health Risks of Wildfire Smoke are Greater in Pregnant Women

Wildfire smoke is made up of a mixture of air pollutants that can cause harmful effects. The pollutant in wildfire smoke of greatest concern is fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), which is so small that it can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream. This can be especially harmful during pregnancy, when breathing and heart rates can be 50% higher. This increased breathing rate increases the amount of toxins entering the lungs and bloodstream. **Recent studies have linked the following conditions to prolonged wildfire smoke exposure and pregnancy:** pre-term birth, lower birthweight babies, gestational diabetes, and maternal hypertension.



## What Steps Should I Take During a Wildfire Smoke Event?

1. **Follow the outdoor Air Quality Index Guidelines for sensitive groups.** The EPA Air Quality Activity Guidelines recommend that pregnant women are not outside for longer than 15-minute intervals during a smoke event. Bookmark [AirNow.gov](https://www.airnow.gov) to follow local air quality conditions.
2. **Protect your indoor air.** Studies show that indoor air can become as unhealthy as outdoor air in a wildfire smoke event. Keep doors and windows closed and use a HEPA air cleaner or DIY Box fan filter in the room where you spend the most time.
3. **Buy food that doesn't need cooking.** Smoke from frying or grilling food pollutes indoor air as well. Try to avoid using the stovetop as much as possible. This is also a good time to add foods high in antioxidants, like berries, kale, dark chocolate and nuts to your diet.
4. **If you have air conditioning in your home or vehicle, change the setting to recirculate.**
5. **Drink plenty of water.** Staying hydrated helps your liver and kidneys to filter toxins from the bloodstream, helping your body to remove the PM<sub>2.5</sub> smoke particles after exposure.
6. **REST.** Activity will increase your breathing and heart rates. Try to minimize activity to low intensity movements and increase times of sleep and rest.
7. **Know the signs of labor and get care if needed.**



For more tips, visit [dphhs.mt.gov/AirQuality/SmokeFromFires](https://dphhs.mt.gov/AirQuality/SmokeFromFires).