

Air quality considerations for schools during bushfires

This fact sheet has been created for principals and staff as a resource to provide guidance during times of poor air quality, particularly in a bushfire situation.

Bushfires can result in a large amount of smoke particles in the air even when fires may be many kilometres away. It is important that schools consider the potential health implication for staff and students on days where there is poor air quality and plan their school activities appropriately.

Schools should look for ways to minimise exposure and adverse effects of bushfire smoke. These include:

- Stay indoors, with windows and doors closed, or stay in air-conditioned premises, if possible. Air conditioning can help to filter out smoke that gets into the building.
- Consider cancelling sporting events and unnecessary outdoor activities
- Keep staff and students indoors for recess and lunch breaks
- Keep students calm and avoid vigorous exercise

In extreme situations where the entire school premises is heavily affected by smoke, the Principal should contact the Director Educational Leadership (DEL) and discuss possible alternative arrangements for staff and students. This may include relocating in the local area where there is greater protection from the smoke.

Signs and Symptoms

Fine smoke particles may affect the breathing system. Some of the signs and symptoms staff and students may experience include:

- itchy or burning eyes
- runny nose
- throat irritation
- shortness of breath
- headaches
- coughing

Smoke particles can also aggravate existing lung conditions, such as asthma. If students have asthma and they develop symptoms such as shortness of breath, coughing or wheezing, follow their asthma action plan and monitor them carefully. If their symptoms persist or if their condition deteriorates don't hesitate to call an ambulance.

Monitoring students exhibiting signs and symptoms or with a diagnosed health condition

It is important to identify students who have a diagnosed breathing condition. Confirm their [Health Care Plan](#) and medication is readily available and there is sufficient dosage to get them through the day.

You should consider the following if they are displaying signs and symptoms:

- Follow First Aid Procedures
- Inform parents
- Discuss whether the parent / carer can pick up the child from school. Discuss whether air quality is better at home or another location.
- Consider relocating to another premise **IF** it can be determined the air quality is better

Make sure students are monitored carefully and call an ambulance if their condition does not improve or deteriorates.

Information and Links

- Incident Support and report Hotline – 1800 811 523
- EAP Supporting You – Personal support – 1800 060 650
- NSW Health https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/emergency_preparedness/weather/Pages/Bushfire.aspx
- NSW RFS - <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/>