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**PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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May 16, 2008

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Health and Wildfire Smoke: FAQ**

**Q. What is the health threat from wildfire smoke?**

**A.** Smoke from wildfires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. Smoke can hurt your eyes, irritate your respiratory system and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases. Fortunately, most people who are exposed to wildfire smoke will not have health problems. How much and how long you are exposed to the smoke, as well as your age and degree of susceptibility play a role in determining whether or not you will experience smoke-related problems. If you experience serious medical problems for any reason, seek medical treatment immediately.

**Q. How can I tell if the smoke is affecting me or my family?**

**A.** Smoke can cause coughing, scratchy throat, irritated sinuses, shortness of breath, chest pain, headaches, stinging eyes and runny nose.

- If you have heart or lung disease, smoke might make your symptoms worse.
- People who have heart disease might experience chest pain, rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath and fatigue.
- Smoke may worsen symptoms for people who have pre-existing respiratory conditions such as respiratory allergies, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in the following ways:
  - Inability to breathe normally
  - Cough with or without mucus
  - Chest discomfort
  - Wheezing and shortness of breath
- When smoke levels are high enough, even healthy people may experience some of these symptoms.

**Q. How can I protect myself and my family from the harmful effects of smoke?**

**A.** The best thing to do is to limit your exposure to the smoke. Specific strategies to decrease exposure to smoke include staying indoors whenever possible, using air conditioners, keeping windows closed while driving in a vehicle, doing less strenuous physical activity and minimizing other sources of air pollution (e.g., smoking tobacco, using wood burning stoves, burning candles or incense and vacuuming).

**Q. Where can I find information about the air quality in the area I live?**

**A.** The Florida Department of Environmental Protection provides updated information on outdoor air quality in Florida. You can access this information by logging into the following website: <http://www.floridadep.org/air/airquality.htm>

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PinellasHealth.com