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Disaster Guidance: 10 Tips for Staying Healthy During Wildfires

This past weekend (December 9-10, 2017) brought fierce Santa Ana Winds to Southern California that are expected to last all week. As of this writing, major fires are burning in Ventura County and other areas within Los Angeles County. The South Coast Air Quality Management District lists the following areas of direct smoke impacts: <ftp://ftp.aqmd.gov/pub/globalist/Advisory2.pdf>

Areas of direct smoke impacts and unhealthful air quality include portions of:

- West San Fernando Valley (Forecast Area 6);
- East San Fernando Valley (Forecast Area 7);
- Southwest Los Angeles County Coastal (Forecast Area 3), and
- Northwest Los Angeles County Coastal (Forecast Area 2).

The California Thoracic Society (CTS), a chapter of the American Thoracic Society has prepared an educational document to be shared with the general public, healthcare professionals and patients affected by this catastrophe.

Wildfire smoke can irritate the eyes, nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause coughing wheezing or difficulty in breathing. Inhaling smoke can be especially dangerous in those with lung disease (such as asthma, COPD/emphysema, pulmonary fibrosis, etc.), heart disease, pregnant women, the elderly and children. These high-risk populations need to take special care and consider consulting with their doctors regarding specific precautions.

Here are 10 basic steps to consider for patients and providers:

- 1. Stay indoors** with windows and doors closed
- 2. Reduce physical activity**
- 3. Reduce other sources of indoor air pollution** such as smoking cigarettes, using a wood-burning stove or frying meat. Do not vacuum anywhere in the house.
- 4. Use central air conditioner or filters:** A home's heater set to the fan mode may be able to filter out some of the particles by "re-circulating" the indoor air through the filter.
- 5. Use air purifiers with HEPA filters.** Note: do not use filters that produce ozone such as "super oxygenators".
- 6. When traveling in a vehicle,** keep windows closed, run the air conditioner and set air to re-circulate to reduce smoke.

7. An **N95 or greater mask** can help reduce inhalation of particulates if properly fitted. A surgical or simple dust mask **will not** protect against particulate exposure. **None** of these masks protect against hazardous gas inhalation. The following video demonstrates how to properly put on an N95 mask.
https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=0d_RaKdqeck
8. **Consider evacuation** to areas with lower air quality index for individuals with lung disease (especially those with asthma, COPD / emphysema).
9. **Create a clean room at home.** Use an interior room with fewer doors and windows and run an air conditioner and room air cleaner if available.
10. **Asthmatics** should ensure that they continue to take their maintenance (“controller”) medications or discuss an appropriate regimen with their physician.

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Adapted from Fire Dangers, Air Quality and Safety for Pulmonary Clinicians and Their Patients from the California Thoracic Society

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