

# Asthma

## Bushfires and Hazard Reduction Burns



**Asthma**  
Australia

Consumer Fact Sheet

Australia's climate is generally hot, dry and prone to drought and many of our native plants burn easily. This means **bushfires and grassfires** are common in Australia. Due to the high fire risk, fire services act outside of fire season to try and reduce risk and intensity of bushfires. One of the methods for this is **hazard reduction burning**, also known as prescribed burning, planned burning or controlled burning.

Smoke from vegetation fires is a common trigger for asthma, it can cause asthma flare-ups and has been associated with hospitalisations and premature death.<sup>i, ii</sup> It's important that people with asthma and related conditions take all necessary precautions to reduce their vulnerability to bushfires.

### When do bushfires and hazard reduction burns happen?

Peak bushfire risk differs in each state and territory, but can occur at any time of the year. Hazard reduction burning generally takes place during autumn or spring and usually only on days when conditions are suitable.

For more information about bushfires and hazard reduction burning or for alerts and notifications speak to your local council, or seek information from the website of your relevant state Department of Environment, the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) or state emergency service.

### How do I manage my asthma during bushfires or hazard reduction burns?

#### 1. Know your risks.

If you have asthma or other related conditions and are triggered by smoke, be aware of this risk and monitor appropriate sites so you can take action early. This may involve leaving the area for the day, staying indoors, avoiding exercise and/or keeping the kids home from school. Follow directions from your state emergency fire services for fire safety advice.

#### 2. Stay on top of your asthma management

The risk of an asthma flare-up after exposure to smoke may be reduced by ensuring good asthma control. This means taking the right treatment, which for most Australians with asthma is a daily inhaled preventer medicine, to keep your symptoms to a minimum and being aware of and managing your risk factors and triggers. Find out more about your current asthma control by calling the free 1800 ASTHMA helpline (1800 278 462).

#### 3. Be prepared

Make sure you have access to your blue reliever medication and continue to use your preventer medication (if prescribed). Inform others around you that you have asthma, and where they can access your blue reliever medication, written Asthma Action Plan or the [Asthma First Aid](#) steps. Make sure you have a fire plan in place (contact your local fire service for more information).

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### 4. Avoid smoke

When smoke is in the air, but fire is not directly threatening you, stay inside and close all windows and doors. Avoid doing any physical activity outdoors. Portable air cleaners which use high efficiency particulate air filters can be useful to provide an area of clean air in a sealed room of your home in case of penetration of smoke and particles.

### 5. Take action

If you develop symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, chest tightness or shortness of breath, follow your written Asthma Action Plan or commence [Asthma First Aid](#). If your reliever medication isn't reducing your asthma symptoms, call 000 and continue the Asthma First Aid process until an ambulance arrives.

### 6. Follow up

Be alert to signs that your asthma is worsening. This could mean symptoms at night or early morning and needing to use your reliever medication more than twice per week. Book an appointment with your doctor for an asthma review.

### What do I do if I don't have my asthma medication?

Large and catastrophic bushfires can result in the need to leave homes and communities without warning. In the event that a State of Emergency is declared which has the potential to impact people with asthma or where they might be displaced without their life saving medication, Asthma Australia in partnership with GSK and the Australian Pharmacy Guild, will work to distribute blue reliever medication to people with asthma impacted by the event.

Otherwise, it's important that you contact your pharmacy and GP to arrange for the re-issue of the prescription of your daily medications for yourself or people you care for as soon as possible after an emergency.

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<sup>i</sup> Horsley, Broome, Johnston et al 2018, Health burden associated with fire smoke in Sydney, 2001–2013, Medical Journal of Australia.

<sup>ii</sup> Broome, Johnston, Horsley et al 2016, A rapid assessment of the impact of hazard reduction burning around Sydney, Medical Journal of Australia.