

Air Quality Issue Q's & A's

Q. What should I do if I smell smoke in my office on campus when air quality is poor due to wildfire smoke?

A. Outdoor air, including wildfire smoke, can enter campus buildings through open windows/doors, mechanical ventilation, and through small openings, joints, or cracks. If you smell smoke indoors, please contact the Customer Service Team at clerks@mcmaster.ca or ext. 24740, to ensure systems are functioning properly.

Q. How is air quality being monitored at the University?

A. When the air quality is poor due to wildfire smoke, our Facilities team is monitoring the air quality in buildings on campus and are making adjustments to reduce the intake of outdoor air and instead re-circulate air within buildings, where appropriate. At a minimum, McMaster has installed high standard air filters (called MERV-13 air filters) in all buildings where air is recirculated to ensure high air quality within our buildings.

A MERV-13 filter has a higher capture efficiency than a normal filter and can help remove finer particles from the air that recirculates through the system. These steps, which were introduced in response to COVID-19, are effective at improving the air quality in our buildings.

Q. I am considered high risk due to my health status. Is it safe for me to be at work during times when air quality is poor due to wildfire smoke?

A. Please refer to the [public health guidelines](#) and consult with your health care provider if you have specific concerns about your risk. Speak with your employment supervisor if you require any workplace accommodation.

Q. I'm feeling anxious and scared about the wildfires. What resources are available?

A. It's not unusual to feel anxious during a smoke event. Review these resources to support your mental health.

- 10 Tips for coping with wildfire smoke, from a public health expert: <https://beyond.ubc.ca/wildfire-smoke/>
- Top tips for parents in dealing with worry around wildfires: <https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/qa-how-to-deal-with-wildfire-anxiety>
- Coping with wildfires and climate change crises: <https://psychiatry.ucsf.edu/copingresources/wildfires>

Employees and their family members with Extended Health Care benefits can

access free mental health supports through Telus Health:

- Toll Free: 1.833.366.4544
- **Visit:** [Telus Health Virtual Platform](#)
- **Download:** LifeWorks Mobile App

Anyone can access free mental health supports through the following resources:

- [Mental health support: Get help](#)
- [Kids Help Phone](#)
- [Hope for Wellness Helpline for Indigenous Peoples](#)

Wildfire Smoke and Your Health

The best way to protect your health is to reduce exposure to wildfire smoke. These resources may offer some additional information and tips on protecting yourself during a smoke event.

Government of Canada – Wildfire Smoke, air quality, and your health

<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/air-quality-health-index/wildfire-smoke.html#toc5>

BC CDC Fact Sheet on Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke

http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Health-Environment/BCCDC_WildFire_FactSheet_HealthEffects.pdf

BC CDC Face Masks for Wildfire Smoke

http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Health-Environment/BCCDC_WildFire_FactSheet_FaceMasks.pdf