

For Immediate Release | June 24, 2019

## Disaster stress: four tips for coping with wildfires, smoky skies

Smoke, evacuations, loss, worry – B.C.'s wildfires affect us all. If you are feeling stressed or anxious, you are not alone.

The fear of having to flee your home, leave possessions behind and relocate can cause distress, fear and anxiety for you and your loved ones. Even the prospect of living with smoky skies during wildfire season can cause distress. It is normal to have these types of feelings react when experiencing an abnormal situation.

No one can predict when or where a big wildfire will occur, so it's best to think ahead about how to stay mentally healthy this summer:

- 1. Prepare yourself and your family:** Having a clear emergency plan and kit ready for your family, pets and livestock can ease your mind and allow you to focus on other needs.
  - Visit [PreparedBC](#) for resources to help you understand the hazards in your location and then build a family emergency plan.
  - Visit [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) for information on wildfire smoke and steps you can take to protect your health, both indoors and outdoors.
- 2. Take care of the basics:** Stress takes a toll on our physical and mental health. Try to eat well and get enough sleep. Be kind to yourself. Give and accept support. Follow your daily routine. Take a break from disaster news coverage and from thinking and talking about disaster events.
- 3. Ask for help:** Whether it's with family, friends, a doctor or a counsellor – talking helps. Crisis lines are available to listen and help anytime – not just during a crisis. People with moderate to severe symptoms that last more than two to four weeks should consult a family physician, if available. Otherwise, reach out to your nearest [Mental Health and Substance Use Centre](#). Symptoms may include: trouble sleeping and eating; feeling depressed or hopeless; being anxious and fearful; having recurring thoughts or nightmares about the event; and avoiding activities or places that are reminders of the event.
- 4. Help others:** Check in on older people and children. Coping may be more difficult for older adults living alone, those with mental health challenges, or those with few social supports. Reaching out to connect with them can be a big help. Children who have experienced previous wildfire evacuations or adverse health effects due to smoky skies may need help from adults who provide care for them. The Canadian Mental Health Association provides [Mental Health Tips For You and Your Family](#).

**If you are struggling right now**, confidential support and crisis lines are available 24/7:

- KUU-US (Nuu-chah-nulth) Indigenous Line at 1-800-558-8717
- Interior BC Crisis Line at 1-888-353-2273
- Provincial Crisis Line 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

Visit <http://gov.bc.ca/naturaldisasterhealth> for more resources to cope with wildfire and natural disaster stress. Community talks, hosted by the Canadian Mental Health Association, will also take place in select communities throughout Interior Health this summer, visit [BCDisasterStress.ca](#) for more information.

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*Interior Health is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and providing a wide range of quality health-care services to more than 750,000 people living across B.C.'s vast interior. For more information, visit [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca), follow us on Twitter [@Interior\\_Health](https://twitter.com/Interior_Health), follow us on Instagram [@weareIH](https://www.instagram.com/weareIH), or like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth](https://www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth).*

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**Attachments:****Photo:**

Photo caption: Jana Abetkoff, Director, Mental Health & Substance Use Network

**Audio Clips:**

Spokesperson: Jana Abetkoff, Director, Mental Health & Substance Use Network

Impacts of Wildfires - Audio Clip

Sign and Symptoms of Stress - Audio Clip

Managing Wildfire Stress - Audio Clip

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