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Riverside County residents urged to be safe in smoke-affected areas

A wildfire that is burning near Idyllwild is generating smoke and ash that is impacting the San Jacinto Valley and communities in and around the San Jacinto Mountains, prompting health officials to urge residents to take precautions with the unhealthy air quality levels.

“Residents throughout Riverside County, particularly those living or working near the fire, need to be aware of the risks of breathing unhealthy air and take steps to keep safe,” said Dr. Cameron Kaiser, Riverside County public health officer.

Kaiser recommends that those who live in areas impacted by smoke should avoid strenuous activity, remain indoors with the air-conditioning on and windows and doors closed. Also, keep the indoor air fresh with a clean filtering system to prevent from bringing smoke inside.

Wildfire smoke can cause a range of health issues, which include burning eyes, runny nose, shortness of breath, scratchy throat, headaches and chest pains. Smoke can also worsen chronic heart and lung disease.

Certain populations are especially vulnerable to the negative health effects, according to Dr. Kaiser.

“The excessive heat and smoke can be dangerous, especially among those with respiratory illnesses like asthma, young children and the elderly. For residents without access to cool, clean air, we advise that they make use of Cool Centers that are open throughout the County,” Kaiser added.

The cool centers are coordinated by the Community Action Partnership of Riverside County, in conjunction with the health department, and are located in local libraries, senior and community centers. Light refreshments and water will be available at some locations.

For a list of cooling center locations, visit www.capriverside.org.

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