

# **SMOKE INHALATION**

**By**

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Victoria asks: With the Silverado fire raging, is it dangerous to breathe the air? What about fireplaces with cooler weather, especially if they have not been cleaned in a long time?

Smoke inhalation occurs when you breathe in harmful smoke particles and gases. This inflames your lungs and airways causing them to swell and block oxygen absorption leading to A.R.D.S (Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome), respiratory failure, and even death if not recognized and treated immediately. Most fires happen in enclosed places such as kitchen/galley or home/boat/RV. Cooking, fireplaces and space heaters, electrical malfunctions, and smoking are the major reasons for fires. Smoke can contain harmful chemicals such as ammonia, sulfur dioxide, chlorine, and even carcinogens. Odorless, tasteless, invisible carbon monoxide is the leading cause of death in smoke inhalation. Always make sure that your fire and carbon monoxide detector batteries are fresh and they are in proper working order as well as cleaning the soot in chimneys and replacing air filters regularly.

The signs and symptoms of smoke inhalation include but not limited to cough with mucus, shortness of breath, headache, hoarseness, pale skin, eye irritation, decreased alertness, sleepiness, soot around nose or throat, chest pain, dizziness, and even coma.

If you experience any of these symptoms, CALL 911! You need oxygen as soon as possible. The paramedics can measure your blood oxygen level using pulse oximetry and administer oxygen immediately. Once in the hospital, various tests can be administered to determine the state of your health. These include chest x-ray, arterial blood gas, and carbon monoxide levels. Based on the test results, they customize your treatments including bronchodilators and steroid anti-inflammatory medicines.

With the fires raging in Orange county currently, it is advisable to stay indoors as much as possible especially if you have asthma and allergies problems. Use the air conditioner in the house thus avoiding open windows. Please wear a mask to protect yourself from inhaling harmful air particles and breathing smokey air.

After you call 911, contact your family doctor as he/she knows you best.