

# After a fire

Stakeholder pack

Department of Health

**OFFICIAL**

## Key information resources

- For up to date information on emergency information and warnings, including drinking water and air quality, visit [VicEmergency](https://emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/) <https://emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/>.
- For further information about air quality and smoke from bushfires with the [Environment Protection Authority Victoria](https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/check-air-and-water-quality) <https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/check-air-and-water-quality>.
- The Better Health Channel has information on returning home after a bushfire – including safety and clean up information – search for ‘Bushfire’.
- If you need medical advice or someone you know is unwell:
  - call Nurse-on-Call on 1300 60 60 24 for 24-hour health advice,
  - contact Virtual Emergency Care – for non-life-threatening emergencies,
  - or see your doctor.
  - In an emergency, always call Triple Zero 000.

## Relief and recovery

- If you have been impacted by the January 2026 Victorian bushfires, help is available.
- Recovery support for people and communities affected by the Victorian fires that started on 7 January 2026.
- Relief and recovery support is available for people impacted by the January 2026 Victorian bushfires. Visit [Emergency Recovery Victoria](https://www.vic.gov.au/january-2026-victorian-bushfires) <https://www.vic.gov.au/january-2026-victorian-bushfires>.
- You can the Emergency Recovery Hotline on 1800 560 760 from 9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday.

## Key messages

### Public health messaging for smoke

- Excessive smoke can aggravate existing heart and lung conditions and cause irritated eyes, coughing and wheezing.
- Everyone should minimise the time spent in smoky conditions whenever practical to do so.
- You can self-assess the air quality near you using the EPA's [air quality checker](https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/check-air-and-water-quality) <<https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/check-air-and-water-quality>>. Your nose is an excellent smoke detector. If you can smell smoke, take the necessary precautions to protect your health:
  - Stay indoors away from smoke. If you must go outside when it is very smoky, consider wearing a mask (P2 or N95). If you have a preexisting heart or lung condition, seek advice from your doctor if you experience difficulty breathing while wearing a mask.
  - Close your windows and doors to keep smoke out of your home.
  - Keep the air inside your home as clean as possible. You can do this by:
    - Closing windows and doors and opening them when air quality improves, using your split system air conditioner or switching other types of air conditioners to recirculate if they have this function, not using evaporative coolers because they bring outdoor air inside.
    - Using an indoor air cleaner, if you have one, that has a high efficiency particle air (HEPA) filter and is the right size for the room.
    - If you think the air in your home is still uncomfortable, consider relocating if it is safe to do so. For example, go to an air-conditioned building like a library or shopping centre.
    - Consider using a P2 or N95 mask indoors. If you have a preexisting heart or lung condition, seek advice from your doctor if you have trouble breathing while wearing a mask.
- People who are sensitive to smoke (people with a heart or lung condition, including asthma; people over the age of 65; infants and young children; pregnant women; and people with diabetes) should actively monitor symptoms and follow their health management plan recommended by their doctor.
- If you are worried about your symptoms, see your doctor or call Nurse on Call on 1300 606 024.
- If you or anyone in your care has trouble breathing, chest pain or discomfort, call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance.

### Mental health and wellbeing

- Emergencies can bring on strong emotions or even physical reactions – and can be different for everyone.
- Talking about how you're feeling, staying connected with others, and taking practical steps to address your concerns can help.
- There are many free mental health support services across Victoria. These provide crisis support, information, resources, counselling and therapy to people of all ages.
- In an emergency where there is immediate risk of harm to a person, call Triple Zero (000).
- For 24-hour crisis support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals

- Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals are a free service for Victorians aged 26 and over.
- They provide treatment, care and support for your mental health and wellbeing close to home.
- They're free and you don't need a GP referral, Medicare card or mental health care plan.
- They provide access to a wide range of professional and confidential support, including from psychologists, peer workers and other mental health workers

<b>Bairnsdale and Orbost</b> (servicing East Gippsland Shire)	Tel: 1300 000 352 <i>(walk-ins and bookings)</i>  24 Service Street, Bairnsdale 3875
<b>Bendigo and Echuca</b> (servicing Greater Bendigo City, Loddon and Campaspe)	Tel. 1800 332 501  <b>Bendigo</b> <i>(walk-ins and bookings)</i> Tel: 03 5497 5600 3/15 Hopetoun Street, Bendigo 3550  <b>Echuca</b> <i>(walk-ins and bookings)</i> Tel: 03 5412 6600 222 Ogilvie Avenue, Echuca 3564
<b>Benalla, Wangaratta and Mansfield</b> (servicing Mansfield Shire, Benalla Rural City Council and Wangaratta Rural City Council)	Tel. 1800 000 842 <i>(walk-ins and bookings)</i>  <b>Benalla</b> 90-94 Nunn Street, Benalla 3672  <b>Wangaratta</b> 76a Reid Street, Wangaratta 3677  <b>Mansfield</b> 31 Highett Street, Mansfield 3722
<b>Mildura</b> (servicing Rural City of Mildura)	Tel. 1300 000 667 <i>(walk-ins and bookings)</i>  2, 124 Deakin Avenue, Mildura 3500
<b>Mount Alexander</b> (servicing Mount Alexander, Central Goldfields and Macedon Ranges)	Tel. 03 4442 9100 <i>(call for support)</i>
<b>Shepparton</b> (servicing Greater Shepparton, Strathbogie and Moira Shire)	<b>Shepparton</b> <i>(walk-ins and bookings)</i>  Tel. 1300 000 559 116 Corio Street, Shepparton 3630

## Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs

- Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs (Hubs) can help with a range of different mental health challenges, including lowered mood and anxiety.
- The Hubs can also support people to address life stressors such as homelessness, financial difficulties and social isolation.
- Support is available through in person appointments at the Hub, via outreach in the community, as well as phone based or online appointments.
- All support is free and available to Victorians of all ages, with no GP or health professional referral required.
- Call 1300 375 330 to have an initial discussion about your needs or you can drop by one of the walk-in services:
  - Ararat Rural City  
**Ballarat Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub**  
105 Dana Street, Ballarat 3350
  - Corangamite Shire  
**Warrnambool Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub**  
24-36 Fairy Street, Warrnambool 3280
  - Golden Plains Shire  
**Ballarat Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub**  
105 Dana Street, Ballarat 3350
  - Horsham Rural City  
**Horsham Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub**  
185 Baillie Street, Horsham 3400
  - Pyrenees Shire  
**Ballarat Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub**  
105 Dana Street, Ballarat 3350
  - Wellington Shire  
**Cowes and Wonthaggi Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub**  
(outreach service only)

## Partners in Wellbeing

- If a Mental Health and Wellbeing Local or Hub is not open near you, you can call Partners in Wellbeing for support on 1300 375 330 Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm.
- Available statewide, Partners in Wellbeing offers free, phone-based support for Victorians aged 16 and over who are experiencing mental health and wellbeing challenges, including those without Medicare or permanent residency.
- Visit Partners in Wellbeing <<https://partnersinwellbeing.org.au/>> for more information.

## Returning home after a bushfire - safety tips

- Check with your local emergency services that it is safe to return to your property after a bushfire.
- Wear protective clothing before entering your property after a bushfire.
- Where possible, try to avoid taking children onto fire-damaged properties. If you do, make sure they remain protected at all times.
- Hazardous materials may be present after a bushfire like asbestos, ashes - especially from burnt treated timbers, LPG gas cylinders, garden or farm chemicals, farm chemicals and other residues from burnt household appliances, and dust.
- Hazardous wastes, such as asbestos materials and burnt CCA-treated timber, need special care during handling and disposal.
- Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards.
- When returning to your property, make sure you are aware of the dangers and take steps to protect your health and safety.

## Use protective clothing to check your property after a bushfire

- Make sure you wear protective clothing before entering your property:
  - Wear sturdy footwear and heavy-duty work gloves.
  - Wear disposable overalls, with long sleeves and trousers.
  - Wear a P2 face mask.
- Put masks, coveralls and gloves into a garbage bag when you leave to dispose of them. Wash your hands after removing contaminated clothing. Shoes should be cleaned before being worn again.

## Hazardous materials after a bushfire

- Hazardous materials that may be present after a bushfire include:
  - asbestos
  - ashes, especially from burnt treated timbers (such as copper chrome arsenate or 'CCA')
  - LPG gas cylinders
  - medication
  - garden chemicals
  - farm chemicals
  - other general chemicals (for example, cleaning products)
  - metal and other residues from burnt household appliances
  - dust.
- If you have a septic tank, remember it may have been weakened in the fire so do not drive or walk over it.

- It is unsafe to spread ash around your property, particularly if asbestos materials were used in your home or other structures, or if CCA-treated timber was burnt. It is also unsafe to disturb the dust when walking around your property.

## Cleaning up your home after a bushfire

- It is unsafe to spread or disturb ash around your property, particularly if CCA-treated timber was burnt. If materials containing asbestos in your home or other structures are damaged, they can now be harmful.
- Where there is extensive demolition, repair and renovation work involving asbestos-containing material, licensed asbestos contractors should be employed to undertake the work.
- If your home has been damaged by fire or smells of smoke from bushfires, you should ventilate it by opening the house up to sunlight and fresh air to help remove the odour.
- Wash indoor surfaces with mild soap or detergent and water.
- For persistent smoke and soot, wear rubber gloves and wash with 4 to 6 teaspoons of washing powder and one cup of household chlorine bleach added to 4 litres of water. Remember to always follow the safety directions on the bleach container.
- Cooking utensils can be washed with detergent and hot water and polished with a suitable polishing agent to remove discolouration.
- You should inspect your makeup and your medicine cabinet after a fire. Throw out anything that has signs of soot, smoke discolouration or fire extinguisher dust. Dangerous chemicals can be ingested or be absorbed through your skin if you keep contaminated items.
- Air soft furnishings (upholstered furniture and bedding) outside in the sunshine and wind. Mattresses may be able to be cleaned by a specialist mattress repairer. It is almost impossible to get the smell of smoke out of feather pillows or foam.
- Low levels of ash on household surfaces are unlikely to cause short or long-term health effects. If anyone in your household is experiencing any health effects from the smoky conditions and you are concerned, seek medical advice.
- If you need to use a ladder, make sure it's in good working order and you can use it safely. Ladder falls can be fatal.
- If you have an evaporative air conditioner which is supplied by tank water, do not use it if this water has been contaminated.

## Heat-affected food after a bushfire

- All foods that have been fire damaged or affected by heat should be discarded. This includes all perishable and non-perishable foods (such as cans or packaged foods).
- Power outages can also leave perishable foods that may have been refrigerated unsafe to eat.

## Debris in water tanks after a bushfire

- Bushfires produce large amounts of smoke and ash, and your tank water could have become contaminated from debris and ash, or dead animals.

- If you have an evaporative air conditioner which is supplied by tank water, do not use it if this water has been contaminated.
- If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual, do not drink it or give it to animals.

## Wash affected clothing after a bushfire

- Wash affected clothing normally and air dry outside in the sunshine and wind. Persistent stains and smoke odour can sometimes be washed from clothing using 4 to 6 teaspoons of washing powder and one cup of household chlorine bleach added to 4 litres of water. After washing, rinse clothes with clean water and dry well.
- Remember to wear gloves and follow the safety directions on the bleach container. Care should be taken as this mix will bleach clothes.
- Clothes left on the clothes line should be rewashed. While wind may have removed some smoke odour, soot, particles and ash may have been deposited on them. Rewashing protects sensitive skin (for example, babies) from possible irritants.

## Asbestos and bushfires

- During a fire, the amount of asbestos fibres released into the air is relatively low. Air monitoring after fires has confirmed this. However, asbestos clumps and some fibres may remain in the ash and may present a risk if disturbed while cleaning up after a fire.
- Dust should be wetted down and protective personal equipment (dust mask, gloves and coveralls) should be worn. In the event of asbestos-containing materials being burnt on your property, a licensed asbestos removalist should be arranged to perform the clean-up work.

## Private drinking water

- Never use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash your hands, wash and prepare food, make ice or make baby formula.
- If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual, do not drink it or give it to animals. Use bottled water for drinking.
- Local water agencies will tell you if tap water is unsafe to drink, use for cooking, cleaning or bathing, and when tap water is safe to use again.
- If you would like to get your private drinking supply tested, speak to your local water agency who can arrange.

## Water tanks

- Prior to using your water inspect your roof, gutters and if possible, look inside your tank for signs of contamination.
- Make sure the first part of run-off after rain cannot go into your tank. This will prevent any water run-off from your roof containing fire retardant from entering your tank. It will also prevent embers, ash and other contaminants from entering your drinking water.
- Only reconnect the down pipes of water tanks when the roof has been cleaned post bushfire.

- If aerial fire retardant or firefighting foam residue is present on the house and/or cars, use a mild detergent with water and brushes to scrub and dilute the dried residue and flush it from the surfaces. Rinse with clean water. A follow-up with pressure washing may help but should not replace scrubbing to remove the residue.
- Dead animals on your roof, in your gutters or in your tank should be removed and disposed of using gloves. Disinfect tank water before re-using.
- Water can be disinfected by bringing the water to a rolling boil or using chlorine (bleach). You can safely use per 1,000 litres of water in your tank approximately 125 mL or 125 g of 4% chlorine household bleach.
- Avoid using household bleaches that contain detergents or other chemicals such as perfumes and wait at least 24 hours before using water to allow for microorganisms to be destroyed.
- Water advisories on Vic Emergency - keep up to date at Vic Emergency <[www.emergency.vic.gov.au/](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/)>.

## Wild animals

- Be careful of wild animals including rodents, snakes or spiders which may be trapped in and around your home. Animals will have lost their homes in the fires and be seeking shelter.
- If bitten - Try to stay calm and reassure the person. Don't tourniquet or cut the wound.
- For certain bites and stings, it is important to act quickly. This may involve pressure bandaging the wound and keeping the person immobile until medical help is available.
- For further information and advice following a bite or sting call the Victorian Poisons Information Centre on Tel. 13 11 26.
- See the Better Health Channel for more information on bites and stings:
  - [Better Health Channel | Bites and stings](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/bites-and-stings-first-aid)  
<<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/bites-and-stings-first-aid>>
  - [Better Health Channel | Spiders](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/spiders)  
<<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/spiders>>

## General health

- Washing hands with soap and water is one of the best ways to stop the spread of illness.
- In emergencies, it's important to wash your hands regularly, and infections like gastroenteritis can occur and be easy to spread.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitisers while effective against some viruses (such as coronavirus), are not effective against gastroenteritis.
- Stay hydrated. While extreme heat may not be with us, warm weather, physical exertion or stress can mean we forget to drink or need to drink water more often. Always have clean water with you.



## Printable factsheets

There's a range of community factsheets available to print in English and commonly spoken community languages on [health.vic | Bushfires and public health](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/environmental-health/bushfires-and-public-health) <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/environmental-health/bushfires-and-public-health>>:

- Bushfire smoke and your health
- After a fire: private drinking water and water tank safety
- After a fire: returning home safely
- After a fire: using your personal protective kit
- Guidelines for use of face masks
- Power outages: food safety after a power failure
- Private water sources in bushfire-affected areas

## More information

- [Better Health Channel](http://www.betterhealthchannel.vic.gov.au) <[www.betterhealthchannel.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealthchannel.vic.gov.au)> - search 'bushfires'
- [Coping without gas or electricity in an emergency](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/emergencies-coping-without-gas-or-electricity) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/emergencies-coping-without-gas-or-electricity>>
- [Supporting people when air quality is heavily impacted by bushfire smoke](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/bushfires-and-public-health/supporting-people-when-air-quality-is-heavily-impacted-by-bushfire-smoke) <<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/bushfires-and-public-health/supporting-people-when-air-quality-is-heavily-impacted-by-bushfire-smoke>>
- Mental health supports
  - [Mental health and wellbeing locals](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/mental-health-wellbeing-locals) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/mental-health-wellbeing-locals>>
  - [Mental health and wellbeing hubs](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-hubs) <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/mental-health-and-wellbeing-hubs>>
  - [Partners in Wellbeing](https://partnersinwellbeing.org.au) <<https://partnersinwellbeing.org.au>>