

Smoke Gets in your Eyes: Woodstoves, Fireplaces and Chronic Disease

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Abstract: Air pollution can trigger asthma attacks, cause difficulty breathing, and make lung and heart problems worse. People with low income and American Indians and Alaska Natives have disproportionately high rates of asthma and cardiovascular disease. Air pollution is especially harmful to people with lung and heart disease, infants, children and older adults (65 and older). During the winter months, smoke from woodstoves and fireplaces accounts for over half of fine particulate (PM_{2.5}) air pollution. The amount of air pollution emitted varies considerably by the types of wood burning equipment being used, frequency of use, and material being burned. To provide detailed information on wood burning patterns, a small cross-agency team of epidemiologists and toxicologists selected a series of five questions to collect data on wood burning patterns statewide. These questions were included in the 2007 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. This presentation details the results of this survey and suggests some possible next steps needed to protect vulnerable populations. Wood smoke emissions could be substantially reduced if alternative devices were substituted for dirtier wood-burning equipment. Specific data on wood burning patterns could be used by policymakers and government agencies to allow better understanding of the problem and enable them to focus intervention activities where they will be most effective.