

# DHHS Primary health care providers notification

South West fires – March 2018  
21/03/2018

## Update

The Department of Health and Human Services is supporting the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), Agriculture Victoria and other government agencies to provide health advice to communities impacted by the fires in South West Victoria that began on March 18, 2018.

As the fire remains not yet under control, advice has been given to in the immediate vicinity to take standard precautions to avoid respiratory symptoms. Peat smoke has been identified as an issue, as there are widespread areas of peat that are still smouldering and will continue to for the coming week, or weeks. Peat is generated gradually in wetlands through the build-up of partially decayed vegetation.

This incident has the potential to impact on the health of the South West Victorian community.

Check the VicEmergency website for the latest incident recovery information: <http://emergency.vic.gov.au/relief/>.

## Actions required

Please assist by sharing smoke health and trauma advice below.

## Key messages

### Bushfire aftermath safety tips

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.

A protective kit can be worn to minimise exposure to airborne dust and other hazards from fire-damaged homes. Protective kits for bushfire-affected home owners are generally available from your local council.

If asbestos-containing materials have been burnt on your property or you are uncertain, a licensed asbestos removalist should be arranged to perform the clean-up work. Councils in the affected regions are able to provide further information and assistance on asbestos removal.

Visit the [Better Health Channel](#) for information about safety after a bushfire.

### **Mental health**

It is normal to have strong reactions following a distressing or frightening event, and people can experience a range of physical, mental, emotional and behavioural reactions.

There are a number support services available to assist you and your family recover from the strong emotional or physical reactions you may be experiencing.

**If at any time you are worried about your mental health or the mental health of a loved one, call Lifeline 13 11 14.**

### **Or contact:**

- Your doctor, local community health centre or Medicare Local
- A Counsellor or Psychologist
- Parentline Tel. 13 22 89 or the Kids Helpline Tel. 1800 55 1800
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Australian Psychological Society Referral Service Tel. 1800 333 497

## **Further information**

Please share information available from the following links and follow us on social media for continuing updates.

Information about smoke impacts can be found here: <http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/your-environment/air/smoke>

Translated fact sheets:

- [\*Smoke from a peat fire\*](#)
- [\*After a fire: returning home safely\*](#)
- [\*After a fire: cleaning up a smoke affected home\*](#)
- [\*Trauma: reaction and recovery\*](#)

### **DHHS**

 Twitter @VicGovDHHS

 facebook.com/VicGovDHHS/

### **Better Health Channel**

 Twitter @BetterHealthGov

 facebook.com/BetterHealthGov

### **Approved by:**

**Health and Human Services Commander**

**Date: 21/03/2018**