

Returning to a Child Care Facility After a Wildfire

Take Precautions. Be Safe. Protect Your Health.



Ash Clean-up and Safety in Child Care Sites Without Fire Damage



- Ash, soot, dust, and other airborne particles may have been deposited inside and outside of the child care site.
- Ash from wildfires is relatively non-toxic but can irritate skin, eyes, nose, and throat. Ash in air may trigger asthmatic attacks in people who already have asthma.
- Ash, dust, and debris (particularly from burned buildings) may contain toxic and cancer-causing chemicals, including asbestos, arsenic, and lead.

Ensure your safety



- If handling broken material (i.e., glass, metals, wood, etc.) wear gloves that protect against cuts, abrasions and punctures (i.e., leather or Kevlar gloves).



- A disposable N-95 mask or better can be worn during clean-up to avoid breathing in ash and other airborne particles. However, they do not protect from gases. Masks may be purchased from a hardware store. N-95 masks must be properly fitted, with no gaps around the edges. An improperly fitted mask is the same as wearing no mask at all.



- Wear safety goggles (not safety glasses) if clean-up may cause ash in the air and if using chemical cleaning solutions, to prevent splashing into the eyes.



- Wear long sleeved shirts, long pants and safety shoes or sturdy close-toed, high-ankle leather shoes if burn debris (i.e., broken glass, metal, wood, etc.) is in the area that is being cleaned.
- Shower regularly throughout the day when cleaning in and out of areas with ash.

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Air Quality Index (AQI)

0-50	GOOD
51-100	MODERATE
101-150	UNHEALTHY FOR SENSITIVE GROUPS
151-200	UNHEALTHY
201-300	VERY UNHEALTHY
301-500	HAZARDOUS

How to determine if it is safe for children to play outside?

Monitor local air quality reports for air quality or alerts. [Airnow.gov](https://airnow.gov) and aqmd.gov are tools you can use to check local air quality. Children are considered a sensitive group.

Monitor Air Quality

When possible, use air purifiers with HEPA filters in rooms where children spend most of their time.

If portable air cleaners are not available or affordable, you may choose to use a do-it yourself (DIY) air cleaner. The Environmental Protection Agency has developed a tip sheet with additional resources to protect your family from wildfire smoke indoors.

<https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-06/Wildfires-One-Pager.pdf>

Keep windows and doors closed until outdoor air quality improves.



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Do not let children play in or with items covered by the ash. Vacuum carpets and upholstery with a vacuum equipped with a HEPA filter to capture fine particles. Shop vacuums and regular household vacuums are not recommended to clean up ash.

Indoor Cleaning



Furniture and other items indoors

- Use damp cloths or microfiber wipes to remove ash and soot from toys and furniture. Gentle sweeping or wiping of indoor surfaces, followed by wetting the area, is the best way to clean an indoor area with after a fire. A solution of bleach and water may be used to disinfect an area, if desired. Read label on container for proper use.
- Wipe books down with a wet cloth to remove ash and soot.
- For porous items, such as stuffed toys, clean them in a washing machine, if possible, discard them if heavily contaminated.



Food

- Plastic bottles with liquid (ex: water), that has been covered in ash should be thrown away. It is not enough to rinse off the bottle as these particles contaminate the caps, making them very difficult to decontaminate.
- Generally, food in the refrigerator is safe if the power was out for no more than 4 hours and the refrigerator and freezer doors were kept close. Keeping the doors to the refrigerator and freezer closed helps maintain the coldest temperatures. If a power outage lasts more than four hours or the refrigerator door was not kept shut, it is best to throw away perishable food items such as meat, dairy products and eggs.
- Food stored in sealed, previously unopened glass or metal cans or jars, such as baby food, should be safe for use. Clean before opening and transfer the contents to another container before eating.
- "When in doubt, throw it out."

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Outdoor Cleaning

- **Do not** let children play in or with items covered by the ash. Try not to get ash into the air.
- **Do not** use leaf blowers or other actions that will put ash into the air.
- Gentle sweeping of outdoor surfaces, followed by wetting the area, is the best way to clean an area with ash.
- A solution of bleach and water may be used to disinfect an area, if desired. Read label on container for proper use.



Sandboxes

- Remove and replace sand in sandboxes, as there is no reliable way to clean it of ash and soot.
- To calculate how much sand is need for your sandbox, consider using a sand calculator tool. Several can be found on the internet.



Playground Equipment & Toys

- Clean outdoor equipment and toys with soap and water, following established cleaning products for ash and soot.
- Avoid using pressure washers, which can aerosolize particles.



Artificial Turf

- HEPA-filter vacuums can filter out small particles and can be used to clean the artificial turf, followed by wetting the area.

Mental Health Resources

State of California Mental Health Resources

<https://www.mentalhealth.ca.gov/>

Listos California

<https://www.listoscalifornia.org/>