

May 2019

## Healthier Northern Communities E-brief

*The Healthier Northern Communities e-brief is produced by the regional Population Health program (Population and Public Health, Northern Health). In the spirit of healthy people who live, work, learn, and play in healthy communities across the north, the e-brief delivers information on resources, learning events, funding opportunities, and other information specific to promoting healthy living and the prevention of chronic disease and injury.*

### Preparing for Wildfire Season

This issue of the e-brief is dedicated to wildfire preparedness. With forest fires already burning in BC, it's important to be prepared ahead of time to stay healthy when air quality is affected by wildfires – in other words, before the smoke hits.

The resources in this issue are relevant for a wide range of audiences, including local governments, emergency preparedness groups, non-governmental organizations and the general public. We encourage you to share widely!



### For Your Information

#### Wildfire Smoke and Health

[Wildfire smoke](#) is a complex mixture of different air pollutants. It can change quickly depending on the type of fuel burned and the atmospheric conditions.

Small smoke particles irritate airways and can travel deep into the body, where they can trigger inflammation and contribute to conditions like:

- Asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD), lung cancer, and heart problems.

Smoky air can also increase the risk of some infections, especially pneumonia in older people and ear infections in children.

- Children, infants, those who are pregnant, older adults, and those with respiratory conditions or other chronic illness are at higher risk from these effects.

For most people, health effects caused by wildfire smoke disappear as the air improves, however, the long-term effects of frequent and intense wildfire smoke events are still not well understood.

## Preparing for Wildfire Smoke

- Wildfires and smoke are lasting for longer periods of time each year, and becoming more extreme and intense. [Preparing](#) for this can help people cope with the smoke for longer periods of time.
- Improved overall health and healthy lifestyles have a protective effect for the risks associated with wildfire smoke.
- Those who are more sensitive to the effects of wildfire smoke can consult with their doctors, update their personal care plans and ensure adequate supply to medications and supports are in place before the smoky periods come.

## Clean Indoor Air

Reducing exposure to smoky air is the best defence. It is also important to ensure [indoor air](#) is kept as clean as possible.

- [Portable air cleaners](#) are mobile units that plug into the wall and can be moved between rooms. They draw air in, remove some of the smoke particles and release cleaner air. They can help people reduce their exposure to smoky air indoors and reduce smoke related health effects.
- Air cleaners are particularly important for those who are more vulnerable to the effects of smoke.
- Consider purchasing a portable air cleaner ahead of the smoky season; the portable air cleaner should be one that uses high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration.

While some individuals have the means to create cleaner air spaces in their homes, communities should consider what supports may be available for vulnerable populations, those feeling socially isolated or those who cannot create a cleaner air space in their home.

- Consider evaluating existing facilities in your community (e.g. libraries, halls or shopping malls) for use as [clean air shelters](#) during smoke or high heat events.

Even a small reduction in smoke exposure can have a positive effect.

## Air Quality Information

- [Air Quality Advisories](#): issued when pollutant concentrations approach or exceed limits, or when degraded-air-quality episodes are expected to worsen.
  - These advisories provide information, help people make decisions about reducing exposure, affect emission reduction actions, and provide health advice.

- [Smokey skies bulletins](#): issued when areas of the province are being impacted or have reasonable potential to be impacted by wildfire smoke within 24-48 hours.
- [Air Quality Health Index](#): provides hourly air quality readings and related health messages.
  - These are great resources to check before heading off to work or play; however, advisories and the AQHI are not available in all northern communities.

## Staying Healthy in the Heat

Extreme heat involves high temperatures and can pose health risks. Over the next 30 years, the number of extremely hot days in a year is expected to more than double in some parts of Canada. [This new infographic](#) conveys the signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke, and provides tips on how to stay safe. The Government of Canada has also published the following:

- Toolkit on [Communicating the Health Risks of Extreme Heat Events](#)
- Best practices guidebook for [Heat Alert and Response Systems](#).

[The Cities Adapt to Extreme Heat](#) provides case studies on how local and regional governments have adapted to cope with extreme heat.

## Community Health Stars

Do you know someone who is taking the initiative to improve health in his or her community? If you do, [tell us their story](#) so we can share it with the north!

## Resources

### Wildfires and Your Health

This [HealthLinkBC website](#) contains a variety of resources from trusted sources on topics such as emergency preparedness, what to do during a wildfire, and what to do during an evacuation.

### BCCDC Wildfire Smoke Response Planning

The [Wildfire Smoke Response Planning](#) website provides a collection of guidance related to best practices for health and wildfire smoke planning, including evidence reviews regarding clean air shelters and evacuations.

### Wildfire Smoke Prediction System

From April to October, [Firework](#) issues twice daily air quality predictions that indicate how smoke from wildfires is expected to move across the country over the next 48 hours.

### Before a Wildfire Check List

The [Government of Canada has issued a checklist](#) of things, activities, and scenarios to consider in order to help individuals prepare for a wildfire, and to guide them through what to do if you see a wildfire approaching.

## **Mental Health & Natural Disasters**

Extreme heat and poor air conditions can challenge our mental health. The [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) and their resource [coping through a natural disaster emergency](#) both provide resources to help foster positive mental health during emergencies.

## **Quitting Smoking with Quitnow**

People who smoke tobacco and other combustibles may experience shortness of breath during fire season and smoky conditions. “Cleaner” air shelters may help reduce exposure. [Quitnow](#) is a great resource for quitting or reducing smoking.

## **BC Community Health Data: Updated!**

The [BC Community Health](#) website has been refreshed with the latest available data. The website provides three tools: Community Health Profiles; a searchable health database; and a visual health atlas. The tools provide an overview of multiple health and well-being indicators for a geographic area to support health and wellness planning.

## **Education and Learning Opportunities**

### **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Two Day Course**

**April 30, 2019 in Kitimat and June 18, 2019 in Prince George**

[The MHFA course](#) was developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada to help people provide initial support to someone who may be developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis.

### **Practical Smoke Preparedness Workshop**

**May 28, 2019 in Prince George**

The BC Centre for Disease Control is hosting a practical smoke preparedness workshop, aimed at the agency level (health authorities, municipalities, NGOs, air quality roundtables, etc.) but is also open to the public. To register, contact [resource.development@northernhealth.ca](mailto:resource.development@northernhealth.ca).

## **Community Events**

### **Bike to School Week**

**May 27 – 31, 2019; Printed kits must be requested by May 7, 2019**

[Bike to School Week](#) is a free, fun, week-long celebration for students of all ages and abilities. GoByBike BC has created [Bike to School Week promotion kits](#). Download tools directly or submit a request for a printed kit before May 7, 2019.

## Funding Opportunities

### Community Planning for Housing

**Deadline: May 10, 2019**

[The Community Planning for Housing program](#) provides grant funding for municipalities and regional district to assist with the cost of hiring incremental planning capacity for a 12-month period.

### Northern Transportation Adaptation Initiative

**Deadline: May 13, 2019**

The [Northern Transportation Adaptation Initiative \(NTAI\) Program](#) provides funding for projects that address the effect of climate change on northern transportation systems. There are three streams of funding: asset/site-specific research; development and testing or deployment of tools, technologies and practices; and training and exchange.

### UBCM Housing Needs Reports Program

**Deadline: May 31 and November 29, 2019**

The [Housing Needs Reports program](#) supports local governments in undertaking housing needs reports in order to meet the provincial requirements. The reports will strengthen the ability of local governments to understand what kinds of housing are most needed in their communities, and help inform local plans, policies, and development decisions.

### Urban Communities Partnering for Reconciliation

**Deadline: May 24, 2019**

The [UCPR pilot program](#) is intended to support events and activities that provide a time and place for dialogue to build on opportunities, support reconciliation efforts, resolve issues of common responsibility, interest, or concern and/or to advance tangible outcomes.

### BC Accessibility Grants Program

**Deadline: May 31, 2019**

Organizations in British Columbia that have been rated through [the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ \(RHFAC\) program](#) can [apply for funding of up to \\$20,000](#) to complete an accessibility improvement project.

### CMA Foundation Healthy Canadian Grants Program

**Deadline: May 31, 2019**

The [Healthy Canadian grants program](#) provides support for community-run initiatives that improve the quality of life for patients and vulnerable populations living in those communities. This year's focus is youth (12 – 25) mental health and substance abuse. There are 15 grants of \$20,000 each available.

### Microfunding for Cannabis and Vaping Public Education

**Deadline: Open; first come first serve with limited funding available**

Health Canada is offering [micro-funding](#) (up to \$1,000) for innovative projects that provide education and/or awareness about the health effects of cannabis and/or risks of vaping. Applicants are encouraged to target youth, linguistic minority populations, rural and remote communities, and Indigenous communities.

### Youth Action Grants

**Deadline: June 30, 2019**

The [purpose of the YAGs](#) is to provide BC youth (ages 12–19) that participated in the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey, the opportunity to deliver a project to improve youth health in their school or community.

### Northern Housing Incentive

**Deadline: Quarterly; contact NDIIT for more information**

[The Northern Housing Incentive](#) program provides grant funding to local governments to create a “Dollars to Door” program that will enhance and support economic development by incentivizing private sector housing development.

### NDIT Housing Needs Assessment Program

**Deadline: Ongoing**

[The Housing Needs Assessment](#) program provides one-time grant funding to local governments for the development of a comprehensive housing needs assessment.

## Northern Health Stories

- [Public dental health: A career that makes a difference](#) by Shirley Gray-Kealy
- [I came for... I stayed because... with Robyn Turner](#) by Tamara Reichert
- [Prince Rupert radiologist Dr. Giles Stevenson presented with prestigious award](#) by Sanja Knezevic

See the latest [stories](#) at [blog.northernhealth.ca](http://blog.northernhealth.ca).

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Are there other opportunities for people to connect within your community in the Northern Health region? Do you have information, articles or resources that you think might be of interest to northern communities? Send your information by email to [healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca](mailto:healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca)

These E-briefs are an information service bringing news of relevant health promotion, resources and research to northern communities from the Population and Preventive Public Health Programs at Northern Health. The news items are for information only and do not reflect any official viewpoint of Northern Health.

For more information on the Northern Health's Population Health Programs visit the Northern Health website at <https://northernhealth.ca/YourHealth/HealthyLivingCommunities.aspx>

**If you have any questions about our list and your privacy, please feel free to phone us at: 250.645.6568**

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