

Dust and your health

Information Sheet

Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand



Dust generated from airborne silt can affect people's health. It can irritate the eyes and upper airways and for those with underlying heart or lung conditions, like asthma, it can worsen symptoms. It is important to take precautions when dust is a significant issue in your area.

This is particularly important for infants, young children and the elderly, who can be more vulnerable to health effects from air pollution.

How to decide if precautions are needed:

Take a common sense approach to protect your health. If dust levels are high and you can see, smell or taste dust in the air, or visibility is reduced, it is a good idea to take precautions (see overleaf).

People who may be most vulnerable to health effects from dust:

- Infants and young children
- Elderly
- People with respiratory conditions, such as asthma, bronchitis and emphysema
- People with heart disease
- Smokers

Health effects from dust can include:

- Irritation of the airways, coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing
- Reduced lung function
- Worsening of symptoms for people with heart and lung conditions like asthma and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

Precautions to reduce exposure to dust:

- Stay indoors and close windows and doors where possible.
- Try to minimise the amount of time outside and avoid vigorous exercise outside.
- Air conditioners are safe to use but make sure filters are kept clean. HEPA filters are recommended.
- Clean indoors regularly using mops and damp cloths to remove dust.
- Avoid sweeping and dusting as it kicks dust into the air.
- Vacuuming can increase dust levels so to try to use a vacuum cleaner with HEPA filter.

If exposure to dust cannot be avoided:

- Wear a well-fitted mask. A P2 or N95 offer the best protection but a surgical mask will still offer some protection.
- Seek medical advice if experiencing increased symptoms.
- Call an 111 if anyone has trouble breathing.

WHERE TO GET HELP



- People worried about their symptoms should contact their doctor or Healthline on 0800 611 116
- If you see heavy machinery being used which is generating significant dust, please report to our pollution hotline on 0800 108 838