

# Returning to Your Home after a Wildfire:

## Rainbow Lake, May 2023



### Protect yourself and your family

Experiencing an evacuation can be stressful and overwhelming.

If you need to talk, call the Mental Health Help Line at 1-877-303-2642 or Health Link at 811.

Indigenous Health is also available toll-free using the Indigenous Support Line by calling 1-844-944-4744.

#### 1. Re-enter Your Home Safely:

Places affected by the wildfire will likely smell very smoky for an extended period of time.

Lingering smoke and fire ash at your home and yard can temporarily worsen personal respiratory issues. If you or any of your family members have breathing difficulties or asthma, take all appropriate precautions to protect yourself.

Call Health Link at 811 for health advice, or consult your family physician for any required medications or extra precautions you may need at this time.

#### 2. Air Quality:

Get the air moving inside your house by using a fan and open your windows. Only do this if there's no smoke in the area.

- If possible, have your ducts and air conditioning system cleaned by a professional.
- HEPA furnace filters may help take away the "smoky smell" from your home. Consider replacing your filter.
- Humidifiers can help settle any floating ash within your home.

#### 3. Use Water Safely:

If your home is connected to the settlement's potable water system, it is recommended that you run all taps in your water system for at least 5 minutes to get out the stagnant water from the water lines.

If your home is connected to a cistern, do a physical inspection of your cistern and test your water before you begin using it. Harmful germs (bacteria), chemicals, or physical debris can get into your water if the well or cistern is damaged. First repair the damage and clean and disinfect your cistern. Information on how to clean and disinfect your cistern can be found at:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/How-to-clean-and-disinfect-a-cistern.aspx>.

Contact your settlement office to find out where to pick up water sample bottles and drop off water samples for testing with AHS Environmental Public Health.

### 4. Discarding Foods and Medications:

- Discard any spoiled foods, condiments, and sauces, even if the refrigerator maintained 4°C at all times.
- Discard any medications that require refrigeration.

### 5. Cleaning Your Refrigerator and Freezer:

Spoiled food products may have impacted your refrigerator or freezer. Clean, sanitize, and deodorize your refrigerator and freezer once you have discarded the spoiled food. To do this:

1. First unplug the refrigerator and freezer.
2. Rinse or blow out the coils and compressors on the refrigerator and freezer.
3. To clean the inside, use soap and water and then rinse with clean water.
4. Sanitize the inside with a bleach/water mixture made by mixing 1 teaspoon of ordinary household bleach for every 4 cups of water.
5. Leave the doors of the refrigerator and freezer open to help them dry out.
6. Once the appliance is dry, reconnect the power.
7. Wait until the inside temperature of your refrigerator has reached 4°C/ freezer temperature is at -18°C before restocking it with food.

### 6. Restore Your Home - How to Clean:

There may be smoke odor, ash, and soot in your home after the fire.

#### A. Exterior Surfaces

- Use a hose, sprayer or pressure washer on the outside of your home, driveway, walkway, vehicle, patio, deck, and outdoor furniture. Rinse off the air intake vents and air conditioner carefully.

#### B. Interior Surfaces

- Wash all surfaces and items inside your home with mild detergent or appropriate cleaning solution and rinse thoroughly. Clean any place where there's ash, dust, or the smell of fire.
- Wet wiping or mopping is safer and better than dry or dust mopping. Change the water if it gets dirty.

Only vacuum with a unit which has a HEPA filter that can catch ash particles.

#### C. Fabric, Carpets and Clothing

- Steam clean carpets, drapes, curtains, and furniture. Change the water often.

Remember that appearance and odor are not good indicators of food safety.

**Be safe. When in doubt, throw it out.**

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- Wash or dry clean all affected clothing and household linens. You may have to run many rinse cycles to get out all the ash, soot and smoke.

### 7. Repair Water Damage:

If your home was damaged by any water while you were gone, such as firefighting activities, or a leaking water pipe, you will need to get rid of all excess water to prevent potential for mold growth. More information is available here:

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/AlbertaDocuments/mould-remediation-private-homes.pdf>

#### Links to more information:

- AHS Wildfire Smoke and Health:  
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/wildfire-smoke-health.aspx>
- Smoke Forecasts: <http://firesmoke.ca/forecasts/current/>
- Air Quality Health Advisories: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/news/air.aspx>
- Special Air Quality Statements for Alberta:  
[https://weather.gc.ca/warnings/index\\_e.html?prov=ab](https://weather.gc.ca/warnings/index_e.html?prov=ab)

For more information, please visit the Environmental Public Health Website: <https://www.ahs.ca/eph>