PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY: CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND SMOKE

(SANTA BARBARA, Calif.) -- The N95 masks being distributed in Santa Barbara County are designed for adults. However, these masks may fit a child if their face is comparable in size to that of a petite adult. The key to knowing if an N95 mask fits effectively is whether an airtight seal can be created around the edges of the mask once it is on the face and pressed into place across the nose. The airtight seal around the perimeter of the mask is what determines if the mask can effectively filter particles. Check for an airtight seal to know if the N95 mask is a good fit.

Children, particularly small children and infants, can be more affected by inhaling smoke particles than adults. Because their body mass is smaller, children exposed to the same amount of smoke as adults are more likely to have symptoms. Small particles (10 micron diameter or less) get deep into the lungs and affect ability to breathe and exchange oxygen. It is important for families with small children to be aware that even if adults in the household have no symptoms, children may be experiencing them.

The air quality index in Santa Barbara/Goleta has been in the “unhealthy / hazardous” range for 3 days. This can have a build-up effect, particularly on children, as the particles accumulate in their lungs. Even if the air quality index is slightly improved in the coming days, otherwise healthy individuals may begin to experience symptoms.

Public Health is advising everyone, but particularly those with small children, to “give your lungs a break” by relocating for at least a few hours to a region with cleaner air if you are able. Even spending 6 hours in clean air can improve breathing and lessen other symptoms associated with smoke exposure. If families are not able to leave the area, stay indoors with all windows closed and consider local indoor activities for children such as movie theaters or recreational spaces.

Some other things to keep in mind:

- Even with the use of a mask, consider limiting time spent outdoors, particularly when air quality is unhealthy.
- Kids with asthma or other medical conditions may consider consulting their doctors first, as the mask can reduce airflow.
- Conditions can change quickly so check air quality at www.OurAir.org