

## "Protecting Children From Volcanic Ash Related Health Hazards"

The following advice is provided by the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

Short term exposure to ash is usually not considered a significant health threat to the general public but precautions need to be taken.

Children face the same hazards from the suspension in air of volcanic ash as other age groups, except they are unlikely to be routinely exposed to heavy concentrations of ash as are certain occupational groups. However, their exposure may be increased because they are physically smaller and are less likely to adopt reasonable, prudent, preventive measures to avoid undue exposure.

The volcanic ash may cause irritation of the lungs or exacerbation of symptoms in children suffering respiratory illness (asthma, cystic fibrosis, tuberculosis). The most obvious step that can be taken to protect children from inhaling airborne ash is to keep children indoors. When ash is visible in the air Children should certainly be advised against strenuous play or running when ash is present. Exertion leads to heavier breathing, drawing small particles more deeply into lungs. Parents might want to plan quiet games and indoor activities during such times. Communities in heavy ashfall areas may wish to organize day-care programs to reduce the economic burden on working parents.

If children must be outdoors, when ash is present in the air, they should wear an approved mask. If no approved masks are available fabric masks (including those improvised from handkerchiefs), will filter out the larger dust particles but should be dampened with water.

Children should be prevented from playing in areas where ash is deep, especially if they are likely to lie or roll in the ash. More frequent cleaning of home interior areas where children play will minimize the amount of indoor ash exposure..

If there is the potential for future ashfall, it would be appropriate for families to obtain masks for each member of the family and to discuss their use. Families should also formulate plans on what to do in an emergency.