

## **Volcanic Ash Advice: Health**

### **What is Volcanic Ash?**

Volcanic ash consists of tiny jagged pieces of rock and glass, is highly abrasive, and mildly corrosive.

### **Effects on people**

Volcanic ash impacts on people include:

- Respiratory effects causing irritations to nose, throat and airways
- Eye irritations, including painful scratches in the front of the eye and conjunctivitis
- Skin irritations
- Water contamination from domestic water supplies (especially roof household systems)
- Clean-up dangers such as risk of injury during activities such as roof cleaning

### **Respiratory symptoms include:**

- nasal irritation and runny noses
- throat irritation and sore throat, and sometimes dry coughing
- people with pre-existing chest complaints have developed severe bronchitic symptoms which can last some days beyond the exposure
- asthma sufferers can include shortness of breath, wheezing, and coughing
- breathing becomes uncomfortable

### **Eye symptoms include:**

- eyes can feel as though there is something in them and can become painful, itchy or bloodshot
- sticky discharge or tearing
- scratches and abrasions
- conjunctivitis or the inflammation of the sac that surrounds the eyeball leading to redness, burning of the eyes, and photosensitivity

### **Recommended Actions**

- Don't panic, and remain calm. Avoid exposure and stay indoors. Close doors and windows, and place damp towels at thresholds to keep ash out
- If exposed to ash use a mask, handkerchief or cloth over your nose and mouth; wear eye protection. Do not wear contact lenses if possible as these can become irritated
- If you have chronic bronchitis, emphysema or asthma, stay inside and avoid unnecessary exposure to the ash
- Be careful when using ladders or on the roof as ash can make surfaces slippery
- Listen to your local radio for information on the eruption
- Conserve water for human consumption
- If there is ash in your water, let it settle and then treat the clear water with bleach (1/2 teaspoon per 10 litres).

### **Detailed advice on ash impacts and preparedness can be found at the following websites:**

Civil Defence websites

[www.getthru.govt.nz](http://www.getthru.govt.nz)

[www.waikatoregioncdemg.govt.nz/Volcanic-eruption/](http://www.waikatoregioncdemg.govt.nz/Volcanic-eruption/)

Information on volcanic ash provided by GNS Science and the US Geological Survey

[www.volcanoes.usgs.gov/ash/](http://www.volcanoes.usgs.gov/ash/)

IVHHN - The International Volcanic Health Hazard Network [www.ivhhn.org](http://www.ivhhn.org)