

# Health is a casualty of climate-fueled blazes

By Climate Central/Kaiser Health News

SANTA ROSA – As the deadliest fires in California history swept through leafy neighborhoods here, Kathleen Sarmiento fled her home in the dark, drove to an evacuation center and began setting up a medical triage unit. Patients with burns and other severe injuries were dispatched to hospitals. She set about treating many people whose symptoms resulted from exposure to polluted air and heavy smoke.

“People were coming in with headaches. I had one. My eyes were burning,” said Sarmiento, the director of nursing at Santa Rosa Community Health, which provides health care for those who cannot afford it. But respiratory problems – coughs and shortness of breath – were among the biggest risks. “We made sure everyone had a mask.”

More than half of the evacuees at the shelter that October night were elderly, some from nursing homes who needed oxygen 24/7. Sarmiento scrambled to find regulators for oxygen tanks that were otherwise useless. It was a chaotic night – but what came to worry her most were the weeks and months ahead.

**Read the whole story**