

# Dirty air is deadlier than war, Aids and smoking combined

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Air pollution shortens the life of the average person worldwide by almost three years and causes more deaths than the total from wars, malaria, Aids and smoking, a study has found.

Scientists said the world faced an air pollution “pandemic”, with the death toll far greater than previously thought.

They calculated that air pollution caused 8.8 million premature deaths in 2015, almost 2 million more than the number previously calculated by the World Health Organisation. Smoking caused 7.2 million deaths, Aids 1 million, malaria and other insect-borne diseases 600,000 and wars and violence 530,000.

The new study took into account a wider range of diseases and conditions, including diabetes, dementia and high blood pressure, which studies have shown are linked to air pollution. It also used new data from some countries, including China.

Globally, air pollution shortens the average person’s life by 2.9 years and by 1.55 years in the UK, where it caused 63,665 premature deaths in 2015, according to the study published in *Cardiovascular Research*.

The researchers found that two thirds of the premature deaths caused by air pollution worldwide were attributable to human-made pollutants, mainly emitted by burning fossil fuels such as diesel, petrol and coal.

They estimated that removing fossil fuel emissions would increase average life expectancy by just over a year, and by nearly two years if all human-made emissions were removed.

The [\*Times Clean Air for All campaign\*](#) is calling for sales of new diesel and petrol cars to be banned in 2030 and for the most polluting models to face charges to enter city centres.

The study looked at the effect of air pollution on six categories of disease: lower respiratory tract infection, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, heart disease, cerebrovascular disease leading to stroke, and other non-communicable diseases, which include conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes. They found that heart disease and strokes were responsible for the greatest proportion of shortened lives from air pollution, or 47 per cent of the total.

They also found that air pollution had a greater effect on shortening lives in older people, with the exception of deaths in children aged under five in low-income countries, such as Africa and south Asia. Globally, about 75 per cent of deaths attributed to air pollution occur in people aged over 60.

Thomas Münzel, one of the authors from University Medical Centre Mainz in Germany, said: "We believe our results show there is an air pollution pandemic. Policy-makers and the medical community should be paying much more attention to this. Both air pollution and smoking are preventable, but . . . much less attention has been paid to air pollution than to smoking."

Jos Lelieveld, from the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry in Mainz, said: "It is remarkable that both the number of deaths and the loss in life expectancy from air pollution rival the effect of tobacco smoking and are much higher than other causes of death. Air pollution exceeds malaria as a global cause of premature death by a factor of 19; it exceeds violence by a factor of 16."

The British Heart Foundation said: "This study presents further evidence that air pollution is a public health emergency that can worsen or shorten lives. The government has a unique opportunity to put this right by strengthening its Environment Bill, including adopting the World Health Organisation's stricter guideline limits into UK law to be met by 2030."

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