

Study finds tear gas could have temporary impact on lung health

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The effects of tear gas are not just short term and could be experienced for up to two weeks after the event, according to a new study.

The study, presented at the European Respiratory Society (ERS) International Congress in Munich today (10 September 2014), investigated the duration of lung health effects in protesters directly exposed to tear gas.

Researchers in Turkey conducted a questionnaire survey with 546 people who had inhaled tear gas during public protests in June 2013. They collected information on smoking history, exposure to tear gas, reported symptoms and the duration of those symptoms.

Results found a range of [respiratory symptoms](#), with 70% of respondents reporting respiratory difficulties, 80% reporting a lasting cough, 45% phlegm production and 43% chest pain. The median duration of both cough and chest pain was 15 days.

In a separate study, the harmful effects of tear gas were seen in people living in the surrounding areas, in addition to the people in the immediate vicinity of where the gas was used.

Researchers interviewed 105 people who lived and worked close to the location of repeated protests during the summer of 2013. They assessed lung health symptoms, duration and location of exposure, and also conducted lung function tests a week after the protests ended.

The results showed that 76% of participants reported breathlessness and 89% reported a lasting cough. The lung function tests found that 20 of participants showed some level of airway obstruction.

The findings suggest that the repeated use of tear gas during a protest with a long duration could have an impact on the health of people living and working in the area it is used.

Dr Eda Uslu, from the Turkish Thoracic Society, said: "These results are significant as they contradict the previous assumptions about the effects of tear gas. Tear gas is not classified as a chemical weapon, but is not allowed to be used between two nations in war situations. Our findings suggest that people who live and work close to protests are also seeing harmful effects on the lungs from the use of this gas. We have also found that the effect on the protesters lasts longer than we previously thought. The use of tear gas should be banned globally to prevent any further damage to health. We also urge researchers to investigate this issue where tear gas exposure may take place in the future.

Provided by European Lung Foundation

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