

Thousands of Londoners hospitalised in three years due to harmful air pollution

April 8 2019, by Ryan O'hare



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Poor air quality in the capital leads to around 1,000 London hospital admissions for asthma and serious lung conditions every year.

This is according to new research, from King's College London and Imperial College, which has found on average four Londoners, including

one child, are hospitalised every day due to asthma caused by [air pollution](#).

The report was commissioned by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan and estimates that between 2014 – 2016 more than 4,000 Londoners were hospitalised because air [pollution](#) worsened their asthma or, in the elderly, serious lung conditions.

Around 1,000 of those hospital admissions were of children under the age of 14. Asthma is the most common reason for urgent admissions to hospital in children in England. The total number of asthma admissions for children in London over the period of this study was 11,000 – meaning almost 10 percent of children's asthma admissions are due to London's air pollution.

Health impacts

Older people were also badly affected, with a high number of over-65s also suffering from the serious lung condition chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, COPD, which is made worse by air pollution. On average, over the period of the study, two Londoners over the age of 65 were hospitalised every day due asthma or COPD exacerbated by air pollution.

The soaring levels of air pollution in the capital is a [health](#) crisis that currently leads to thousands of premature deaths each year, harms lung development in children, and increases the risk of a range of illnesses from asthma to cancer, and from strokes to dementia. The cost of air pollution on London's health system has been calculated as billions of pounds a year.

As part of effort to curb toxic air the Mayor of London is launching an Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in central London. Operating 24

hours a day, 7 days a week, most vehicles including cars and vans will need to meet new, tighter emissions standards or be liable for a daily charge to drive in the zone. The central London ULEZ aims to reduce toxic emissions from road transport by around 45 per cent.

Commenting on the research, Dr. Daniela Fecht from Imperial's School of Public Health, said: "The findings of our study are important, not just to demonstrate the problem of current levels of traffic-related air pollution on asthma-related admissions to hospital but also to establish a reference to evaluate policies and their impact on health such as the ULEZ."

Toxic air

It is estimated 600,000 people in London suffer from asthma, including 240,000 children. Two thirds of people with asthma say air pollution leaves them fighting for breath. While hospitalisation due to asthma can be a relatively rare occurrence, it is still extremely serious. However, many more people with the condition who do not go to hospital are still affected by high levels of air pollution and have to use their medication, for example inhalers, more frequently.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: "As someone who developed adult-onset asthma over the last few years, I know from personal experience that London's [toxic air](#) is damaging people's health.

"This study is a stark reminder that air pollution disproportionately affects the most vulnerable Londoners and I'm doing everything in my power to protect children, the elderly and those with respiratory conditions from our filthy air."

Dr. Heather Walton, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Health at King's College London, said: "It has been known for some time that air

pollution exacerbates asthma but health impact assessments usually quantify respiratory hospital admissions overall.

"This study provides separate estimates for asthma admissions in children and adults and for [asthma](#)/COPD admissions in the elderly.

"Analysing the [health impacts](#) of [poor air quality](#) is a core component of King's civic responsibility and these results highlight that reducing air pollution in London should provide important benefits for asthmatic and COPD patients."

Provided by Imperial College London

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