

AIR POLLUTION SHORTENS AVERAGE INDIAN LIFE EXPECTANCY BY OVER FIVE YEARS

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Pollution - Air, Water, Soil & E-waste

Latest findings from the global Air Quality Life Index show that nearly 250 million people in northern India could lose over eight years of their lives due to air pollution

Recent scientific research that discussed the possibility of the novel coronavirus being airborne sparked a nervous frenzy among many people. But what everyone forgot was that a much more potent silent killer actually still lurks in the air: particulate pollution.

Latest data from the annual update report of the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI), an innovative tool created by the The Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC), reveals that air pollution posed the greatest risk to human health before the pandemic and will continue to remain so if regions around the world don't resort to stricter clean air policies.

At a global scale, the 2018 AQLI data finds that particulate pollution shortens life expectancy by nearly two years, relative to the World Health Organization's (WHO) guidelines on air quality standards. Globally, an average person is exposed to particulate pollution concentrations of 29 g/m³ (microgram per cubic metre), which is nearly three times the WHO guideline of 10 g/m³.

The AQLI is a pollution index that quantifies the impact of particulate air pollution on life expectancy. Apart from using hyper-localized particulate measurements from around the world to see how pollution affects communities globally, the index also shows how air pollution policies can increase life expectancy when they meet WHO air quality guidelines, existing national air quality standards, or user-defined air quality levels. Michael Greenstone, the Milton Friedman Distinguished Service Professor in Economics and creator of the AQLI along with others at EPIC, says that while the threat posed by the pandemic is grave, "embracing the seriousness of air pollution with a similar vigour would allow billions of people around the world to lead longer and healthier lives."

The latest report, which takes into account data from 1998-2018, contains startling findings for South Asia. According to the findings, particulate pollution has been on the rise in this region, and shortens lives more than anywhere else in the world. India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh account for nearly a quarter of the world's population, but are also ranked among the top five most polluted countries in the world. In fact, a quarter of India's population is exposed to pollution levels not seen in any other country. Roughly 248 million residents in northern India are particularly at risk and stand to lose more than eight years of life expectancy if 2018 pollution levels persist. "The levels of air pollution we see in these regions through new satellite data is unprecedented," said Anant Sudharshan, executive director, South Asia at EPIC, during an online press conference on the report.

The report adds that since 1998, average annual particulate pollution in India has increased by 42%. Lucknow has the highest level of pollution in the country—11 times higher than the WHO prescribed guidelines. "Residents of Lucknow stand to lose 10.3 years of life expectancy if pollution (levels) persist," the report says. The national capital is not far behind, but the report adds that Delhi residents could see 9.4 years added to their lives if pollution levels were reduced to meet the WHO guideline and 6.5 years if the levels met India's own national standards. Poornima Prabhakaran, deputy director, Centre for Environmental Health (CEH) at Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), says the impact of air pollution is not restricted to just respiratory

issues, as previously thought. "There's increasing evidence that air pollution is the new tobacco," she said during the conference.

With the country now slowly opening up and the threat of covid-19 still looming, Prabhakaran says it is all the more crucial to address air pollution. "I don't think we have a choice," she says. "Maybe because of the extended periods of lockdown and work from home schedules for many people, the vulnerabilities could be less this year. But some of the stopgap measures, like the odd-even scheme, cannot take a back seat," she added.

There are, however, some signs of encouragement, both globally and in India. Ever since hitting a peak in 2011, particulate air pollution concentrations have dropped significantly in China due to stringent policy changes. The report also took into account India's National Clean Air Programme, announced by the central government last year, which aims to reduce particulate pollution by 20-30% by 2024. India's decision earlier this year to switch to fuel emission standards on par with the European Union standards is also seen as a massive step towards tackling pollution more seriously.

The report illustrates how some lessons can be learnt from Europe, Japan and the United States as well. Places like London, Los Angeles and Osaka were once some of the most polluted cities in the world. But over many years, the offshoring of polluting industries combined with well-implemented policies have led to cleaner air in these regions. The US, for example, enacted the Clean Air Act in 1970, which established the National Ambient Air Quality Standards, setting maximum allowable concentrations of particulate matter, among other pollutants.

[Click here](#) to read the Mint ePaperLivemint.com is now on Telegram. [Join Livemint channel](#) in your Telegram and stay updated

Log in to our website to save your bookmarks. It'll just take a moment.

Your session has expired, please login again.

You are now subscribed to our newsletters. In case you can't find any email from our side, please check the spam folder.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

