

'INDIAN LUNGS UNDER EXTREME STRESS'

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

Acute respiratory infections (ARI) accounted for 69.47% of morbidity last year which was the highest in the communicable disease category, leading to 27.21% mortality.

Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal reported a large number of patients and fatalities due to ARI as per the National Health Profile-2019, which was recently released by the Union Health Ministry.

According to World Health Organisation, acute respiratory infection is a serious ailment that prevents normal breathing function and kills an estimated 2.6 million children annually every year worldwide. Indians face the double burden of heavy air pollution in addition to the high rate of ARI which hits children the hardest, said experts here.

“When you breathe in polluted air, particles and pollutants penetrate and inflame the linings of your bronchial tubes and lungs. This leads to respiratory illness such as chronic bronchitis, emphysema, heart disease, asthma, wheezing, coughing and difficulty in breathing. Children seem to be most vulnerable to the harmful effects of air pollution,” noted Samantha Castellino, consultant paediatrician, Surya Hospitals, Mumbai. Dr. Castellino said with the air quality deteriorating, parents should ensure their kids get minimum exposure to pollutants and are well protected to prevent respiratory issues.

Archana Dhawan Bajaj, gynaecologist, Nurture IVF Centre, said: “The current level of air pollution poses a high risk to pregnant women and the baby. The foetus receives oxygen from the mother, and if she is breathing polluted air, it can increase the health risk of unborn babies. Pregnant women in the first trimester need to be more careful as risk increases and pollution can cause a medical condition called intrauterine inflammation. Prenatal exposure to pollutants increases risk of pre-term delivery and low birth weight, factors that can lead to developmental disabilities later on.”

Manav Manchanda, senior respiratory specialist, Asian hospital, Faridabad, explained that children are particularly susceptible as they “breathe through their mouths, bypassing the filtering effects of the nasal passages and allowing pollutants to travel deeper into the lungs.” “Children may ignore early symptoms of air pollution effects, such as an asthma exacerbation, leading to attacks of increased severity,” he said.

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