

Alarming Report Released from the WHO: Pollution is a Major Cause of Death



Last month, the World Health Organization (WHO) released a report detailing the results of a study claiming that unhealthy environments are responsible for up to 25 percent of deaths in children younger than age 5. The report lists the outdoor and indoor environmental risks that lead to premature death in approximately 1.7 million children worldwide annually. Amongst the top offenders in contributing to pollution-related deaths are: secondhand cigarette smoke, ambient air pollution, and exposure to chemicals from inadequately ventilated indoor cooking activities.

Children are especially vulnerable to air pollution and the effects of exposure to hazardous chemicals due to their developing organs, immune systems, smaller bodies and airways. Evidence suggests that harmful exposures can start as early as in utero.

What do these results mean?

The report provides a comprehensive overview of air, water, and environmental hazards that affect children's health by contributing to such problems as respiratory infections and asthma, as well as increasing their lifelong risk of disease. WHO finds most of these environmental risks are preventable with proper interventions.

The most important thing to take away from the results of this study is that premature death and disease can be prevented through healthier environments. By learning more about outdoor and indoor air quality and taking steps to promote healthier air, we can significantly reduce the number of children that die every year as a direct result of being exposed to air pollution.

What can I do to promote healthy indoor air quality for my children?

First and foremost, do not smoke indoors or allow anyone inside of your home to smoke. Secondhand cigarette smoke can lead to respiratory infections and trigger allergy and asthma symptoms. Secondly, make sure that your house has adequate ventilation, especially above your stove. Always use your hood vent when you are cooking. Thirdly, limit use of products containing harsh chemical ingredients inside of your home. This includes: cleaners, detergents, fragrances, shampoos, soaps, antibacterial products, and air fresheners. Avoid buying household products and furnishings made from wood laminate or that are held together with formaldehyde containing adhesives.

If you have young children, consider purchasing a Home Air Test annually to alert you to any potential indoor air quality problems. By taking preventative measures you can make sure your air quality is safe and healthy for your children.