

# Air pollution 5th leading cause of death in India

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Air pollution is the fifth leading cause of death in India after high blood pressure, indoor air pollution, tobacco smoking and poor nutrition, with about 620,000 premature deaths occurring from air pollution-related diseases. India faces an unprecedented public health crisis due to air pollution, the Centre for Science and Environment's (CSE) analysis of government data and the Global Burden of Disease report's data on India has shown.

The green think tank released its own assessment and the global study's India specific data on Wednesday warning that the number of premature deaths due to air pollution had increased six-fold over the last 10 years.

Air pollution is now the seventh leading cause behind the loss of about 18 million healthy years of life in India due to illness. It comes after indoor air pollution, tobacco smoking, high blood pressure, childhood underweight, low nutritional status, and alcohol use.

CSE's own assessment of the air pollution data generated by the government painted the grim facts that are leading to the public health crisis.

"Close to half of cities are reeling under severe particulate pollution while newer pollutants like nitrogen oxides, ozone and air toxics are worsening the public health challenge," CSE estimates say. Half of the urban population breathes air laced with particulate pollution that has exceeded the safety standards. As much as one third of urban population is exposed to critical level of particulate pollution. Smaller cities are among the most polluted in the country.

The data is a damning indictment of India's supposed



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growing urban regions. Out of the 180 cities that are monitored, only two towns — Malapuram and Pathanamthitta — in Kerala meet the low pollution norms (pollution levels remaining at 50% below the standard) for all pollutants.

About 78% cities (141 cities) exceed the standard set for particulate matter of size below 10 microns (PM10). As many as 90 cities have critical levels of PM10 and of this, 26 cities have most critical levels of PM10, exceed the standard by more than 3 times. Gwalior, West Singbhum, Ghaziabad, Raipur, and Delhi are top five critically polluted cities.

The data analysis shows the situation is only getting worse with time. "The PM10 monitoring network has doubled between 2005 and 2010 – it has increased from 96 to 180 cities. During this period the cities with low level of pollution has fallen from 10 to 2 and the number of critically polluted cities have increased from 49 to 89 cities. In 2005 about 75% of cities exceeded the standard. In 2010, a total of 78% of cities are exceeding the standard," CSE said.

Warning that vehicular pollution will continue to be the most important reason for concern in coming years as cities grow and get more densely populated, CSE has advocated that the National Ambient Air Quality Standards should be made legally binding.