

Incense smoke hits lungs, can trigger asthma

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London: Incense smoke, common in Indian homes, has been found to be harmful to human lungs. Burning incense generates indoor air pollutants that cause inflammation in human lung cells, researchers from the University of North Carolina say. The researchers analyzed particulate concentrations and levels of gases such as carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, oxides of nitrogen and formaldehyde.

Human lung cells were placed in a chamber to expose them to the smoke, then incubated for 24 hours to allow particulates to settle and the cells to respond. The resulting inflammatory response, a hallmark of asthma and other respiratory problems, was similar to that of lung cells exposed to cigarette smoke.

Incense is burned weekly in about 94% of households in the UAE and in majority of houses in India for worship as well as to remove cooking odours. Since people there spend more than 90% of their time indoors, researchers said, indoor air pollution has become a source of rising concern.

Researchers found that



RAISING A STINK?

most types of incense emitted significant amounts of particles, carbon monoxide, formaldehyde and oxides of nitrogen, resulting in the inflammatory response.

Indoor air pollution (IAP) is already claiming 500,000 lives in India every year, most of whom are women and children. According to the World Health Organisation, India accounts for 80% of the 600,000 premature deaths that occur in south-east Asia annually due to exposure to IAP.

The study, by the Gillings School of Global Public Health, involved testing over three hours in an indoor chamber with a high concentration of smoke. PTI