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Delhi pollution leaves schoolchildren gasping for air

44% kids with low lung function, attention-deficit disorder 4.1 times higher: Study

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Schoolchildren bear the brunt of air pollution in the national Capital. The increasing level of toxics like nitrogen dioxide, PM10 and PM2.5 (Particulate Matter) has made children more susceptible to respiratory diseases. A recent study has found that 32 per cent of children sought medical help after being diagnosed with respiratory problems. The study found reduced lung function in 43.5 per cent of schoolchildren.

Also there is Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

(ADHD) in children chronically exposed to high level of vehicular pollution. The ADHD is 4.1 times more prevalent among schoolchildren of Delhi.

"The data has been culled out from a research done for several years in the national Capital. The PM10 levels are only going up. With increasing vehicular traffic, the density of smoke and dust particles in the air has increased. The trend is alarming, and it has already taken its toll on the youth," said Anumita Roychowdhury, the Executive Director of Research and Advocacy, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

Indoor and outdoor pollution is the reason behind the deteriorating health of children. With schools surrounded by residential areas and increasing vehicular traffic poisoning the air, schoolchildren are inhaling harmful gases during their daily travels between schools



and their residence.

"There is no doubt that children are the most vulner-

able section. Though air pollution is a problem concerning everybody, but it is mainly the

schoolchildren who suffer the most. Lung infections and bronchial asthma are common

diseases found in schoolchildren," said Sanjeev Bagai, a pediatrician and former CEO of the Batra Hospital.

In Vasant Kunj alone, around 700 to 800 school buses commute in an hour. A Californian study in Delhi shows commuters breathe far more harmful particles inside vehicles while travelling. According to the study, with PM2.5 found critically high in the city, pollution concentration inside vehicles can be 1.5 times higher than the surrounding background. The short-term peaks during travel can go nearly 16 times the daily limit.

Sanjeev Bagai said Delhi children helplessly travel and study in over-crowded environment. This is the reason they are afflicted with ailments more frequently. "This is the plight of this city. 70-80 children are filled in one classroom.

There is hardly any ventilation in school cabs," he added.

A survey conducted by the CSE has also come up with another alarming fact. Respiratory problem due to air pollution is one of the reasons of children's absence from classrooms.

In another study by a US-based health institute, it was found that air pollution is the fifth largest killer in India taking 6.2 lakh lives per year and Delhi is among one of the five most critically polluted regions in the country. The other four most critically polluted regions in the country are Ghaziabad, Gwalior, West Singhum district in Jharkhand and Raipur, according to the study.

The study has claimed that 6.2 lakh premature deaths in India occur due to air pollution-related diseases, a six-fold increase as compared to that in the year 2000. It said air pollution had also turned out the fifth

leading cause of death in the country, after high blood pressure, indoor air pollution, tobacco smoking and poor nutrition.

Global Burden of Disease (GDB) report by US-based Health Effect Institute has ranked air pollution as one of the top ten killers in the world, and sixth most dangerous killer in South Asia. "6.20 lakh premature deaths occur in India from air pollution-related diseases. This is a shocking and deeply disturbing news. This calls for urgent and aggressive action to protect public health," Sunita Narain, Director General CSE, said here on Wednesday.

"About 78 per cent of the cities (141 cities) exceed the PM10 standard. Of this ninety cities have critical levels of PM10, 26 cities have most critical level of PM10 exceeding the standard by more than three times," the report said.