Air Pollution Linked to Higher Number of Hospitalizations for Blood, Skin, and Kidney Conditions

Scientists all over the world are becoming increasingly aware of the damage air pollution does to human health, and a new study from researchers at Harvard has found a link between airborne fine particulate matter and increased hospitalizations for common blood, skin, and kidney conditions. Researchers saw higher instances of hospitalizations for septicemia, urinary tract infections, kidney failure, skin and other tissue infections, and electrolyte disorders. The biggest culprit here is PM2.5, extremely fine particulate matter generated by fossil fuel combustion, power plants, airplanes, wildfires, and other combustion reactions. The study also determined that a little goes a long way. Scientists saw hospitalization numbers rise, even with short-term exposure and at PM2.5 levels lower than current World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines.

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PM2.5?

PM2.5 is defined as particulate matter less than 2.5 micrometers or less in diameter. The smallest particles visible to the human eye are 50 micrometers, and at 2.5 micrometers, these particular particulates are smaller than pollen, plant, or mold spores. Due to their tiny size, these particles bypass the nose and throat, settling in the lungs or even circulatory system. Long-term exposure to PM2.5 can result in heart disease, stroke, asthma, and chronic kidney

disease, among other conditions.

Air Conditions

American air quality is greatly improved over the last twenty years. PM2.5 levels, in particular, have dropped 39 percent since 2000. That will likely change, as the Trump administration continues to undermine the Clean Air Act. Recent attempts have moved to disregard methane emissions from power plants, rollback mandates that require states to minimize smog production, and challenge zero-emissions vehicle standards in California. This study and countless others have made the case that this will not be good for our health.



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According to the WHO, 7 million people die each year from conditions caused or exacerbated by fine particle matter in the air. The United States has remained relatively unscathed, but if air quality standards are relaxed, that could change very quickly.

Sources:

- *Short term exposure to fine particulate matter and hospital admission risks and costs in the Medicare population: time stratified, case-crossover study* – The

BMJ

- *Study Links Short-Term Air Pollution Exposure to Hospitalizations for Growing List of Health Problems* – Inside Climate News
- *What is PM2.5 and Why You Should Care* – Bliss Air
- *Particulate Matter (PM2.5) Trends* – EPA.gov