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### Worldwide study shows that air pollution and birth complications are linked

It is terrifying to think that an estimated 7 million people die from air pollution every year around the world. As if this weren't enough, a recent study published in the journal *PLOS Medicine* shows that air pollution is also going as far as to threaten the health of those not yet born.

#### What is PM2.5?

This recent study focused on the fine particulate matter PM2.5 that is defined as particles that are 2.5 microns or less in diameter. PM2.5 can be found indoors and outdoors, coming from vehicle emissions, forest fires, smoking, and even cooking. The pollutant is the smallest class of inhalable particles, with its particles' width being 30 times smaller than a human hair. For something so small, PM2.5 has now been associated to approximately six million premature births, and as many as three million underweight babies around the world in 2019 alone.

#### How does the study link to environmental justice?

Although the study clearly found links between PM2.5 and adverse birth outcomes on a global level, more problems have been found in less developed countries when compared to the birth outcomes of wealthier western countries. For example, when looking at birth weight reduction caused by PM2.5, researchers estimate that the reduction is 10 times higher in babies in South-Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa than in North America and Western Europe. This acts as a clear reminder that even something as global as air pollution can still have disproportionate effects on those with lower socioeconomic status.





## **Why does this study matter?**

This new study is important because air pollution is not restricted by national borders. Studying the adverse health effects of air pollution, and understanding the full scope of the issue, requires exploring all of its impacts at a global level. The international implications of this study will hopefully incite policy makers around the world to take this issue more seriously and respond with the regulatory reforms that are needed. Currently, important regulatory forces around the world, such as the United States Environmental Protection Agency, fail to adequately classify PM2.5 as the true risk factor to health that it is.

### Citation:

Zhang, Huanjia. "Air Pollution Linked to Millions of Birth Complications across the Globe." *Environmental Health News*, EHN, 29 Sept. 2021, <https://www.ehn.org/air-pollution-birth-defects-2655187427.html>.