Outdoor air pollution

The term air pollution refers to harmful particles suspended in the air, or gases in the atmosphere, that can be breathed in. It is a mixture including particles, ozone, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds and carbon monoxide. The mixture is different depending on location, season and sources of pollution in the area.

Areas for action

- Living close to a busy road increases a child’s risk of developing asthma and urban planning needs to consider proximity of road traffic to housing/schools
- Current evidence shows urgent action is needed to tackle air pollution in Europe
- The EU should implement WHO-recommended air quality guidelines for outdoor air through an ambitious revision of limit values for ambient air pollution
- All European countries should support the WHO Parma Declaration on Environment and Health to reinforce efforts to reduce source pollution from all sectors – industrial, transport and energy
- EU member states must make air quality an integral part of their transport, industrial and energy policies and ensure that the correct level of governance – national, regional or local – is equipped to tackle the sources of pollution
- Member states need to improve cooperation on transboundary pollution

Air pollution affects 100% of the population from unborn babies to the very elderly

A large proportion of Europe’s population live in areas with unhealthy outdoor air

Recent studies on childhood asthma have shown that the benefits of clean air have been underestimated in the past

Short-term increases in air pollution increase respiratory symptoms

In the long-term, air pollution can reduce life expectancy, affect lung development, increase asthma and lead to other lung and heart diseases

Urgent action is needed to reduce air pollution levels in Europe