

Health in Our Changing Climate: Air Pollution

Why Now?

Exposure to air pollution increases the risk of heart and lung conditions including high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, asthma and lung cancer. It harms pregnant women and babies by increasing risk of preterm birth. Clean air protects all Virginians, and particularly those at highest risk.

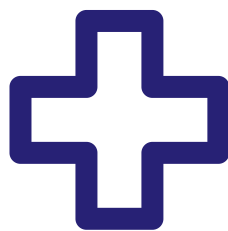
- In Virginia, an estimated 579,000 adults and 139,000 children suffer from asthma, placing them at higher risk from air pollution.¹
- A recent study found that 485 premature deaths in Virginia in 2016 were due to air pollution emitted by cars, trucks, and buses in the region.²
- Children, older adults, those with chronic diseases, outdoor workers, and those with low incomes are particularly at risk.
- Concentrations of air pollution in Virginia are estimated to cause 3,000 premature deaths, 3,600 hospitalizations, and 1,600 emergency department visits every year.³

Burning fossil fuels such as coal, gasoline, and natural gas releases harmful air pollution. Cleaning the air protects the health of all Virginians.



485

Premature deaths occurred in Virginia in 2016 due to air pollution.



3,600

Hospital admissions estimated due to air pollution.



700,000+

Virginians who suffer from asthma, placing them at higher risk from air pollution.



Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action

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Disparities in Impact

The impacts of poor air quality are not felt equally in Virginia. Different communities and regions are impacted in different ways.

- Virginia ranks 8th out of 56 states and territories on estimated health risks due to toxic air pollution from facilities. The majority of facilities are concentrated in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.⁴
- As of 2017, about 12 Virginia counties experienced an average of 2 to 10 unhealthy smog days per year.¹
- According to the 2022 Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America report, of 100 major cities in the U.S., Richmond, VA is the 12th most challenging place to live with asthma.⁵



8th

Virginia's rank for estimated health risks related to toxic air pollution from facilities.

What We Can Do

Working together towards clean energy sources for our electricity and transportation reduces air pollution. The Virginia Clean Economy Act, passed in 2020, has made Virginia a leader in pollution-free energy solutions that clean our air and protect our health.

Join Virginia's clinicians in supporting responsible policies to address air quality and the health needs of Virginians.

References:

1. <https://www.lung.org/research/trends-in-lung-disease/prevalence-incidence-lung-disease>, accessed 5/4/2023

2. Calvin A Arter et al 2021 Environ. Res. Lett. 16 065008

3. Industrial Economics, Incorporated. An Assessment of the Health Burden of Ambient PM_{2.5} Concentrations in Virginia. 2020.

4. Air Toxins and Health Risk in Virginia. 2019. <https://vasierra.club/toxicsreport.pdf>

5. Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, (2022). 2022 Asthma Capitals.



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