




EDITORS' PICK | Sep 28, 2021, 02:00pm EDT

# Air Pollution Linked To Millions Of Premature Births In 2019, Study Finds



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**TOPLINE** Air pollution could potentially be a leading driver of premature births and low birthweight around the world, according to new [research](#) published in *PLOS Medicine* Tuesday, adding to the growing body of evidence exposing the hidden costs of the climate crisis.



air pollution is likely contributing to preterm births, a study found. GETTY IMAGES

KEY FACTS

- Air pollution likely contributed to some 6 million preterm births and nearly 3 million underweight babies born globally in 2019, according to the peer-reviewed analysis from researchers at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) and the University of Washington.
- Indoor air pollution, primarily from cooking stoves, accounted for two-thirds of these births, the researchers found, mostly in poorer countries in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where indoor pollution is most common.

PROMOTED

- The number of preterm births and low birthweight babies could be slashed by nearly 78% if pollution were minimized in these regions, the researchers found.
- However, air pollution can still pose a significant health risk in wealthier countries, the researchers warned, estimating around 12,000 U.S. premature births in 2019 linked to outdoor pollution.
- The findings highlight the fact that pollution affects infants, as well as adults, explained lead author Rakesh Ghosh, a public health researcher at UCSF, adding it “should now be considered a major driver” of illness and death in infants.

BIG NUMBER

15 million. That’s how many babies are born too early each year, [according](#) to the World Health Organization, counted as before 37 weeks of gestation. That’s more than 1 in 10 babies. Approximately 1 million children die each year from complications associated with premature birth, the WHO said, and it is the leading cause of death in children under 5. The infants that do survive often “face a lifetime of disability,” the agency said. This burden is not shared equally around the world, however, and “almost all of these babies survive” in high-income countries.

KEY BACKGROUND

[Earlier research](#) from the same team found that air pollution contributed to some 500,000 infant deaths in 2019. It adds to growing research revealing even small amounts of air pollution can have profound effects on our minds and [bodies](#). Higher rates and more [severe](#) instances of [suicide](#), [depression](#) and [schizophrenia](#) have all been linked to air pollution, long term exposure has been linked with [reduced](#) intelligence, especially among men, and [research](#) suggests tens of thousands of people die each year due to exposure to pollution from wildfires. The [WHO estimates](#) air pollution is responsible for some 7 million premature deaths every year and reduces the quality of life for millions more. The extent of the burden places air pollution on par with other major health threats like tobacco smoking and an unhealthy diet, the WHO said.

FURTHER READING

[Wildfire Pollution Kills Thousands Of Americans Each Year, Study Finds](#) (Forbes)

[Increased Air Pollution Boosts Chances Of Severe Mental Illness, Study Finds](#) (Forbes)

[Global Air Pollution More Dangerous Than Thought, WHO Reports](#) (Forbes)

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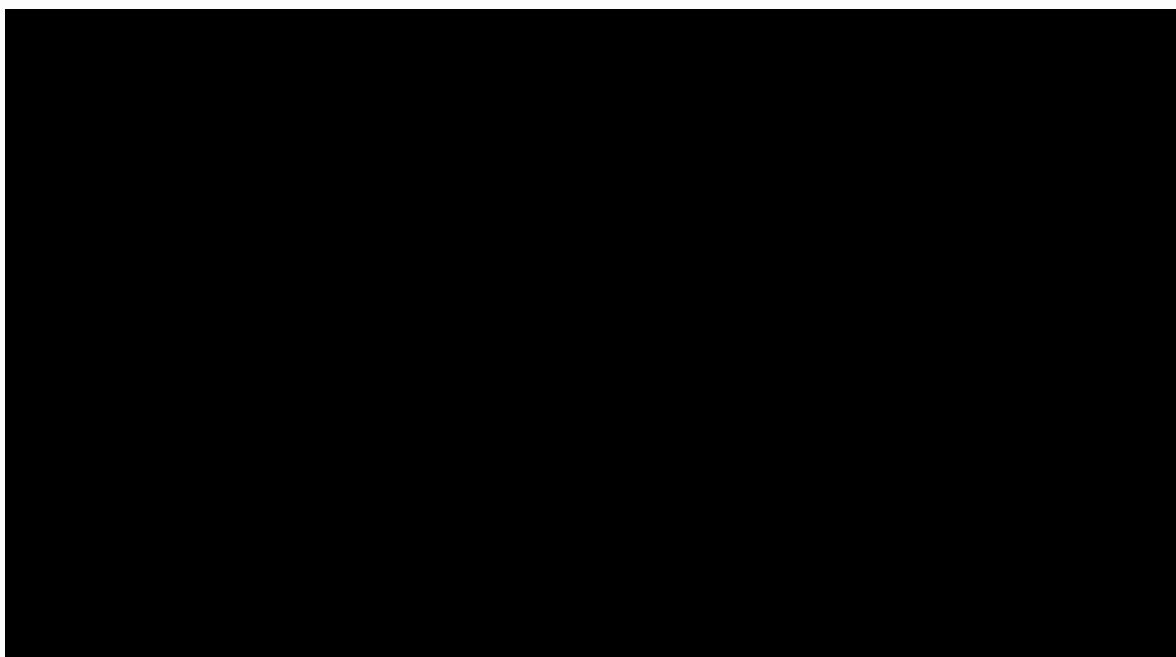
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