**Pregnant women 'should consider moving to the countryside' because air pollution may raise the risk of stillbirth, doctors warn**

* **Worldwide, for every 1000 total births, 18.4 babies were stillborn in 2015**
* **Researchers identified a very strong link between stillbirth and pollution**
* **Scientists called for tighter curbs on vehicle fumes and industrial waste**
* **Also said pregnant women should consider moving to greener areas**

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Pregnant women who are exposed to smog are more likely to suffer a stillbirth, a major review concludes today.

Researchers say the risks are particularly high during the third trimester, the last three months.

Worldwide, for every 1000 total births, 18.4 babies were stillborn in 2015 - and although in the West this has been linked to infections and lifestyle, their exact cause remains a mystery.

But Danish researchers who examined 13 studies have identified a very strong link to car exhaust fumes and other pollution.

In light of the study, scientists called for tighter curbs on vehicle fumes and industrial waste - and said pregnant women should consider moving to less polluted areas.

The team from the University of Copenhagen found that even if the concentration of pollutants in the air increased by a small amount – 4 micrograms per cubic metre – the risk of stillbirth rose by 4 per cent.

Dr Marie Pedersen, lead author said: ‘Stillbirth is one of the most neglected tragedies in global health today, and the existing evidence summarised deserves additional investigation.

‘If the evidence of an association between ambient air population and stillbirth is confirmed in future studies, it would be of major public health importance.’

Professor Jouni Jaakkola, of the University of Oulu, told [**the Telegraph**](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2016/05/25/air-pollution-may-raise-risk-of-stillbirth-and-pregnant-women-sh/): 'The existing evidence is suggestive of causality for air pollution and stillbirth.'

Telling a pregnant woman to move to a greener area would be ‘wise advice,’ he added.

Only last week a report warned of a postcode lottery in stillbirths across the UK with rates in some areas being 40 per cent higher than others.

Experts said the variation was ‘woefully inadequate’ and criticised hospitals and doctors for failing to investigate the cause.

Stillbirths are often triggered by complications in the placenta, the tube which supplies nutrients to the baby in the womb.

This may be caused by an infection or a genetic fault but often the causes are unexplained.

Previous research has found that certain lifestyle factors also increase the risk such as smoking, alcohol, obesity and the mother’s age.

Today’s research published in the journal Occupational and Environmental Medicine concluded that the ‘body of evidence’ shows air pollution ‘is a risk factor for stillbirth.’

Nazeeba Siddika, a doctoral student at the University of Oulu, Finland, who was involved in the research said: ‘Foetuses are more affected by a variety of environmental toxicants because of differential exposure and physiological immaturity.

‘The biological mechanisms by which exposure to ambient air pollutants leads to foetal death is not very clear.’

Jean Golding, Emeritus Professor of Paediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology, University of Bristol, said: 'This is an important gathering together of the studies that have been done on this topic.

'It should be noted that the air pollution measurements are related to the area in which the pregnant mother lives, but no actual measurements were made on the mothers’ exposures.

'This would be an important next step, but not easy to do. I agree with the authors, that this is a topic that warrants detailed further research.'

But Professor Kevin McConway, Emeritus Professor of Applied Statistics at the Open University urged expectant mothers not to be alarmed by the findings.

‘I don’t think these new findings should be a serious cause for concern for individual pregnant women – if there is an increased risk of stillbirth, this review indicates that the increase is pretty small,’ he said.