While the Country is caught in a lockdown and faces a grim battle with coronavirus, the Central Pollution Control Board has assessed that the ‘Janta Curfew’ on March 22 and the lockdown since March 24 has led to a near dramatic improvement in the air quality across large parts of India especially Delhi-NCR and the Indo-gangetic plain. Industrial cities, however, saw no respite.

* As on March 29, 2020, a total of 91 cities were under ‘Good’ & ‘Satisfactory’ category, with 31 cities with ‘Good’ AQI values. As on March 29, 2020 no city is under ‘Poor’ AQI category.
* Substantial improvement in air quality of Delhi NCR is noted during the lockdown period- PM10 and PM2.5 levels were reduced by about 35 to 40% in Delhi as the major contributing sources to PM & NOx emissions (prominent pollutants in Delhi NCR) have been restricted.
* The improvement in air quality of 85 cities was noted as most of the vehicles remained off road and non-essential industrial units closed during Janta Curfew and national wide lockdown
* More specifically, in north India, three weeks of lockdown cleaned the air enough for people in Jalandhar to see for [the first time in 30 years the](https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/himalayas-visible-lockdown-india-scli-intl/index.html)majestic snow-capped peaks of the Dhauladhar mountains, a part of the Himalayan range about 214 kilometres to the north.

**Air pollution will mean more Covid-19 deaths. The warning is loud and clear for India**

* When I heard American pulmonologist Dr Nicholas Marks in an NPR podcast describe the lungs as “these exquisite machines, containers of air that just kind of blow life-giving oxygen into the blood through a thin wall, a membrane”
* “What’s so elegant about it is that that membrane is so thin and delicate,” Dr Marks explained in the podcast. It was this delicate membrane that Dr Marks worried about when he first heard about Covid-19, because what Covid-19 does is inflame that membrane, making the thin, delicate walls of the human lungs very thick.
* “Suddenly, the lung gets really stiff. And instead of it being really easy to get enough oxygen in, now, suddenly, it requires tremendous work to do it.” Sometimes that even leads to patients needing a ventilator to breathe for them.
* It’s not just Covid that affects human lungs this way. Many respiratory diseases do – including those triggered by air pollution some diseases may not be as immediately lethal as Covid-19 and, more importantly, they don’t spread in bunched up clusters, overwhelming doctors and hospitals at once. But their naturally flatter curve doesn’t mean they kill fewer people.
* In 2017, India lost 2,326,771 million lives to pollution. China ranks second, with 1,865,566 lives lost. The two countries – the world’s most populous – are the only nations to lose more than a million lives to pollution every year.
* In 2019, the world emitted around 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per day by burning fossil fuels, vehicles, Industies and cement production. In early April 2020, emissions fell to 83 million tonnes per day, a drop of 17%, and some countries' emissions dropped by as much as 26% on average during the peak of the confinement.
* If pre-pandemic conditions return by mid-June, then 2020 emissions could decline by 4% compared to 2019 but if restrictions remain worldwide until the end of the year, then emissions could drop by 7%.