

Editorial

Smog and the Growing Burden on Child Health in Lahore

Shehzad Saleem

King Edward Medical University, Lahore

Lahore's recurrent smog has now evolved into serious public health concerns. The city has repeatedly been ranked among the most polluted cities worldwide, with fine particulate matter levels many times higher than World Health Organization guidelines.¹ These conditions have resulted in a visible rise in respiratory infections, asthma exacerbations and emergency visits, particularly among children, who are the most vulnerable group.² Pediatric wards in large public hospitals report seasonal surges of wheeze, chest infections and poorly controlled asthma during high pollution periods, adding pressure to already burdened health services.³

Children are vulnerable due to developing lungs and higher levels of outdoor exposure. Alongside direct respiratory effects, smog also weakens immunity, contributing to higher infection rates and prolonged illness in children.⁴ Pakistan is among the most climate vulnerable countries, and United Nations agencies report that millions of children in Punjab are exposed to unsafe air. Through technical assistance, policy support and child focused programs, the United Nations works with government and academic institutions to align climate action with health protection.⁵

Major teaching institutions in Lahore including Mayo Hospital Lahore and King Edward Medical University are actively responding to the climate challenge like smog, and have integrated smog-related respiratory disease into routine clinical practice, surveillance and medical training. In collaboration with the Punjab Health Department, ongoing activities include monitoring respiratory trends, seasonal preparedness and public awareness efforts. Our pipeline plan focuses on expanding pediatric asthma support clinics during smog months, linking hospital admission data with air quality indicators, and strengthening community-based counselling for parents.

Smog and climate change are now clinical realities for the health sector. Therefore, to address the health effects of smog effectively, the Provincial and National Health Authorities must work together consistently, use grounded data, and plan for the long term. Our institute is prepared to offer its assistance.

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