



UK HEALTH
ALLIANCE ON
CLIMATE CHANGE

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Stroke, heart attacks and lung cancer mean coal power plants must go, say health bodies

The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change – representing 600,000 doctors, nurses and allied health professionals – has urged the Government to protect the public’s health by implementing its pledge to phase-out coal power. [1]

Air pollution from coal plants causes many serious health conditions including stroke, coronary heart disease and lung cancer. It disproportionately affects children and kills more people than road accidents [2].

In a report published today, *A Breath of Fresh Air*, [3] the Alliance says that nearly 12 months after the Government announced it would end the burning of coal by 2025 it is yet to publish a consultation document. [3]

Coal pollution is both harmful to health and brings significant associated costs. Independent research has shown that the UK’s coal phase-out could save up to 2,900 lives and up to £6.7 billion in costs due to ill health per year.

Coal-fired power plants emit large volumes of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and fine particulate matter. These air pollutants have serious and far ranging health effects. Short-term impacts include cardiovascular and respiratory hospital admissions, exacerbated asthma symptoms, and reduced lung function. Long-term impacts include reduced life expectancy, death from stroke or coronary heart disease, lung cancer, bronchitis in children, chronic bronchitis in adults, heart attacks, heart arrhythmia, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Coal, as one of the most carbon intensive energy sources, is also a key driver of climate change which is itself a significant risk to the health of the British public by increasing the risks of flooding, heatwaves and the spread of disease.

Dr Richard Horton, Editor-in-chief of *The Lancet*, said:

"The phase out of coal use is an essential step towards creating a sustainable energy policy for the UK. It is also a vital co-benefit for health—ending coal use will deliver long-lasting health and environmental dividends for the British population. Life expectancies will be prolonged, disease and disabilities reduced, and future risks to health diminished. This is an opportunity to be seized."

Janet Davies, Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Chief Executive & General Secretary, said:

"Cutting air pollution from coal will greatly benefit the lives of many people with long-term chronic health conditions and help to protect the health of future generations. Tackling air pollution and climate change will have numerous health benefits but it requires a joined-up approach from Government to ensure the health impacts are better recognised and fully realised."



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Jonathan Griggs, Professor of Paediatric Respiratory and Environmental Medicine and Fellow of Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPC), says:

“Known as the ‘invisible killer’, coal is one of the most important public health threats. Children are particularly vulnerable, and air pollution from burning coal has also been linked to low birth weight and pre-term delivery as a result of maternal exposure during pregnancy. The phase-out of coal is a double win for tackling the twin health threats of air pollution and climate change.”

Professor John Middleton, President of the Faculty of Public Health, said:

"Air pollution is the second biggest public health threat after smoking and kills 40,000 people a year. Coal fired energy is particularly damaging through its invisible particulates and because it is a driver of climate change.

Both air pollution and climate change present serious risks to public health, but a joined-up approach to tackling these threats can reap enormous benefits - particularly for our most vulnerable - as well as cutting the health burden and costs to the NHS. The UK must play its part in shifting from coal powered energy to renewable energy sources and so contribute to the agreement in Paris to reduce carbon emissions.”

A Breath of Fresh Air highlights the need to align action on climate change and air pollution in order to protect and promote health.

ENDS

Notes to the editor

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[1] <http://www.ukhealthalliance.org>

[2] There were 1,732 reported road deaths in 2015, according to the Department for Transport https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/533293/rrcgb-main-results-2015.pdf

[3] Please also see attached document and <http://www.ukhealthalliance.org/new-report-breath-fresh-air-addressing-climate-change-air-pollution-together-health/>

[4] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/amber-rudds-speech-on-a-new-direction-for-uk-energy-policy>

[5] Jones D, Huscher J, Myllyvirta L, Gierens R, Flisowska J, Gutmann K, et al. Europe’s Dark Cloud: How Coal-Burning Countries are Making their Neighbours Sick. Health and Environment Alliance. 2016



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About the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change

The UK Health Alliance on Climate Change brings together Britain's major health institutions. Our aim is to encourage stronger, smarter approaches to tackling climate change that protect and promote public health, whilst also reducing the burden on health services.

The Alliance's members include: Royal College of General Practitioners, Royal College of Physicians, Royal College of Nursing, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Royal College of Emergency Medicine, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Royal College of Anaesthetists, Royal College of Psychiatrists, Faculty of Public Health, Royal Society of Medicine, Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health, the Climate and Health Council, The Lancet, British Medical Association and the British Medical Journal.