

# Reducing Air Pollution Globally May Contribute to Healthier Lifestyles and Lower Cancer Risks

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The Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) has called for global action to improve public health and prevent millions of deaths from cancer and other noncommunicable diseases by drastically reducing air pollution in light of World Environment Day on June 5, 2023.

"Creating cleaner and greener environments to reduce air pollution is about fostering conditions that encourage more active, healthier lifestyles, further lowering the risk of various cancers and noncommunicable diseases," highlighted **Sonali Johnson, PhD, MSc**, Head of Knowledge, Advocacy, and Policy at the UICC.

## State of the World's Air Pollution

According to the World Health Organization, only 1% of the global population—about 80 million individuals—breathes air that does not exceed air quality limits. Exposure to air pollution can lead to cancer, strokes, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, and other health issues.

Previous studies have found that air pollution may contribute to 6.7 million deaths annually, matching the mortality rates seen during the peak years of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. This crisis is especially pronounced in low- and middle-income countries, accounting for 92% of air pollution–related deaths.

The global health damages associated with air pollution are estimated at a staggering \$8.1 trillion, or 6.1% of the global gross domestic product.

Air pollution is potentially threatening progress being made in reducing the burden of cancer worldwide by contributing to the rise of the number of cancer diagnoses each year—many of which may be preventable. According to *The Lancet* Commission on pollution and health, air pollution may be responsible for 15% of all lung cancer deaths.

## Solutions for Reducing Air Pollution

Implementing measures such as fostering the transition to renewable energy; promoting public transportation, bicycling, and walking; increasing green spaces; and strengthening pollution control policies can significantly reduce air pollution. Not only do these actions directly lower the risks of developing cancer and other diseases by limiting exposure to harmful pollutants, but they also indirectly promote better health by creating environments conducive to physical activity.

Marking World Environment Day, the UICC has appealed to the global health community and policy makers to recognize the correlation between the environment and individuals' health.

The UICC announced that it is making air pollution–related cancer a key focus and plans to collaborate with the Clean Air Fund to synthesize the latest global evidence, spotlight best practices, and identify research gaps on the impact of air pollution on cancer.

### Conclusions

"World Environment Day serves as a reminder that action toward a cleaner environment is also a step toward a healthier population and a crucial element in reducing the burden of cancer around the world and particularly in low-resourced regions least equipped to manage the disease," concluded **Cary Adams, MBA**, Chief Executive Officer at the UICC.

**Disclosure:** To learn more about the UICC's air pollution and cancer initiatives, visit [uicc.org](http://uicc.org).

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