

Traffic fumes can increase children's risk of allergies by 50 per cent

Children who live near busy roads are 50 per cent more likely to develop allergies, a new study shows.

By Kate Devlin Medical Correspondent

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Traffic pollution drastically increases their risk of developing diseases like asthma and eczema.

Kids who live less than 50 metres away from a busy street are the most at risk, according to the research by German scientists.

They also had a greater chance of developing a food allergy, the findings, published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine, show.

"We consistently found strong associations between the distance to the nearest main road and the allergies disease outcomes," according to Dr Joachim Heinrich, who led the study.

"Children living closer than 50 metres to a busy street had the highest probability of getting allergic symptoms, compared to children living further away."

Dr. Heinrich and his team, from the German Research Centre for Environment and Health at the Institute for Epidemiology in Munich, looked at almost 6,000 children, aged between four and six, living in the greater Munich area.

They calculated the children's average exposure to traffic pollution based on the distance from their home to a busy or main roads.

They also tested exactly what the children were being exposed to by monitoring the quality of the air at different location around the city, focusing on particulate matter, tiny pieces of material such as soot in the air, and nitrogen dioxide, a main component of traffic pollution.

The researchers found that the nearer a child lived to a busy traffic area, the greater the chance that they had developed an allergy, rising by 50 per cent among those whose homes were less than 50 metres away from a major road or highway.

More than 12.2 million people in Britain are thought to suffer from allergy-related illnesses.

These include five million asthmatics around the country.

Previous studies have suggested a link between heavy goods vehicles and an increase in allergies.

Scientists believe that this could be because diesel fumes release 100 times more carbon particles, which can cause irritation and trigger allergies, in to the air than petrol fumes.

These particles can also then combine with other causes of allergies, such as pollen, to create a more severe reaction.

Pat Schooling, from Action Against Allergy, said that she was not surprised by the high level of association between traffic fumes and children developing allergies.

She said: "There does seem to be a link between high levels of traffic pollution and high levels of allergies, particularly among children and young people.

"If children have to be exposed to high levels of traffic, perhaps when they are going to or from school, it is possible to try to encourage them to wear a mask to shield them from the pollutants.

"But in general we would advise that avoidance of whatever is causing the allergy is the best immediate answer to the problem."

Allergies are thought to cost the health service more than £1 billion a year to treat.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/2125228/Traffic-fumes-can-increase-childrens-risk-of-allergies-by-50-per-cent.html>