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## Air Pollution Is Linked to an Increase in the Number of Preterm Births

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Researchers have just published the results of a huge study on preterm births and pollution. The research team found that a common type of air pollution, fine particulate matter, was linked to an increase in preterm births. This was a problem across the globe though some regions were affected more than others. The findings are in the scientific journal *Environment International*.

Although there are many kinds of pollution, fine particulate matter is one of the most common air pollutants. Particulate matter (PM) refers to tiny particles in the air that can be breathed in or otherwise ingested, including chemical vapors, smoke, dust, pollen, and soot. Fine particulate matter refers to PM particles that are less than 100 nanometers in length, small enough to penetrate the lungs. These tiny particles may even damage other organs after entering the lungs, making PM pollution a major human health concern. Both air pollution and preterm births are on the rise but scientists had never directly compared the numbers to check for correlation.

Scientists from The Stockholm Environment Institute led a global research team to conduct a study on the possible connection between preterm births and air pollution. The team analyzed data from millions of preterm births that occurred around the world in 2010. They found a strong correlation between fine particulate matter concentrations and the number of preterm births; 18% of all preterm births in the study could be explained by air pollution alone. Countries with high levels of PM, including dust, had the most preterm births. While the researchers acknowledge that pollution alone isn't responsible for these disparities, it appears that air pollution is a major risk factor for preterm births.

The results of the study show a link between a region's level of air pollution and the number of preterm births. The authors emphasize the economic and social costs of preterm births while recommending strategies to reduce pollution emissions.

### REFERENCE

Malley et al. Preterm birth associated with maternal fine particulate matter exposure: A global, regional and national assessment. *Environment International* (2017).

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