China's air pollution blamed for 8-year-old's lung-cancer

An eight-year-old girl becomes China's 'youngest' lung-cancer patient as doctors say high levels of air pollution responsible for her condition

A pedestrian is picked out of gloom in his red jacket on a smoggy day in Jilin in China. Concern is growing over air quality in Chinese cities as the density of airborne particles is several times above World Health Organisation recommended limits. Photograph: Stringer/Reuters

From cancer villages to lung-choking pollution, the impacts of China's pollution problems on its citizens are becoming more and more publicised. But nothing is quite so shocking as an 8-year-old girl being diagnosed with lung cancer which her doctor says is a result of air pollution.

The girl from Jiangsu province, who has not been identified, has been described as
China’s youngest lung cancer patient by state media. According to a report on the People's Daily website, the girl lived beside a busy road and was exposed to PM2.5 pollution, fine particulate matter considered to be dangerous because it lodges deep in the lungs and can enter the bloodstream.

The report, which was circulated widely online, quoted Dr Feng Dongjie from Jiangsu Province Tumour Hospital who is treating the girl and said that air pollution was the cause of her illness.

The report also stated that more people die from lung cancer each year in China than from any other type of cancer. In October the World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified air pollution as carcinogenic.

It said that there is "sufficient evidence" that expose to air pollution causes lung cancer and that exposure has increased significantly in "rapidly industrial countries with large populations".

Last month, the city of Harbin was effectively shut down as air pollution levels beat the grim records set earlier this year in Beijing. Many cities in China, particularly those in the north of the country, are likely to face more clouds of grey smog over the coming weeks as central heating systems are turned on for winter.

Improving air pollution has become a priority for the Chinese government which announced a number of measures in recent months including cutting coal consumption and closing polluting factories and plants.

This week the Chinese government said that schools should close when the air pollution reached high levels. It said that when the highest warning for air pollution is issued a number of other measures will also come into force including closing factories, restricting car use and a ban on barbecues. According to a circular from the Ministry of Environmental Protection, businesses should also adopt flexible working hours.

Xie Zhenhua, deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) told a press conference this week that increased air pollutants caused by fossil fuel use were the main cause of smog which has severely impacted people's health.

He said that smoggy weather affects physical and mental health and has caused concern within China and abroad. Nearby countries such as South Korea and Japan have raised concerns that air pollution from China will reach reach their cities.

Xie, the country’s top climate change negotiator, said that the air pollution problem will be alleviated in five to ten years. However, that might not be quick enough for the residents of Chinese cities who monitor the air quality daily to decide whether they need
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