

National

Children and older people at risk as high smog alert issued

Karl Mathiesen

A surge in air pollution today across much of England poses a risk to older people, children and those suffering from respiratory diseases, health charities say.

The government has put smog alert levels at "very high" - its most extreme warning - for some parts of south-east England.

In Brighton, Eastbourne and Hastings the official advice is for all residents - regardless of their health - to reduce physical exertion. Older people and children on Easter school holidays have been urged to avoid any strenuous activity at all.

In other areas of England, particularly the south-east and Midlands, the smog

levels will be high enough to cause problems for those with pre-existing problems.

Dr Penny Woods, chief executive of the British Lung Foundation, said: "To reduce the impact, people who find their health affected can take simple steps such as avoiding busy roads, especially during rush hour, and refraining from strenuous exercise outside."



Asthma UK said sufferers should carry their inhalers at all times. It warned that children could be more affected by pollution than adults

The event closely follows another high-level pollution event in March. Professor Malcolm Green, founder of the BLF, said long-term exposure to air pollution was "associated with lung diseases including asthma, as well as lung cancer, and can make symptoms worse in those with pre-existing respiratory conditions".

Asthma UK told asthma sufferers to carry their inhalers at all times, especially as the high pollution event was due to combine with increased pollen counts.

"Poor air quality and pollen allergy can both trigger asthma symptoms, and increase the chance of a potentially life-threatening asthma attack. Children can be more affected by pollution because

they have faster breathing rates, and their lungs are still developing," it said.

Woods said it was unfair that those suffering asthma and other lung conditions should be repeatedly forced indoors by air pollution events.

"People living with lung conditions shouldn't have to take such steps simply to avoid being made ill by the air they breathe. With periods of high pollution often resulting from a combination of domestically-produced pollution and that from mainland Europe, we need urgent action from government to clean up the air we breathe, across all government departments and at a pan-European level."

Keith Taylor, Greens MEP for the south-

east, said the problem should be a national priority. "Whoever forms the next government, one of the first things they must do is to urgently address this public health crisis that seems to be getting worse."

Simon Birkett, director of campaign group Clean Air in London, said: "If there is one lesson this week, it's that we must follow the lead of cities like Paris that are issuing public health warnings, restricting traffic and putting forward ambitious plans to triple cycling rates."

Dr Helen Dacre, a meteorologist at the University of Reading, said: "On Saturday the weather will change. Clean Atlantic air will spread across the UK and pollution will return to low levels."