



INFORMATION RELEASE

“Know your air for health” aims to help us breathe more easily

Brussels, 6 May 2014 (World Asthma Day) - Improving air quality can limit the symptoms of asthma and other breathing problems in children and adults, say HEAL/EFA on the launch of the “Know your air for health” website today. (1)

Information on the website sheds light on how air pollution is implicated in the development and rise of asthma, and provides tips on reducing exposure – for example, by checking local pollution levels online, switching to walking or biking in cities and by avoiding outdoor activity during rush hour. (2)

People with asthma suffer more during or after days with higher pollution levels. They suffer from more wheezing, coughing and attacks of breathlessness, which are accompanied by a lower lung function and the need for additional relief medications. (3) EFA and HEAL believe that suffering from air pollution can be significantly reduced through stronger EU air policies and greater awareness raising on the harm of exposure to polluted air.

Air quality is a major contributor to asthma in children. Research suggests that more than 15% of new cases of asthma in children may be the result of living near a polluted road. (4)

Adult asthma is more common in women. “I have severe asthma and my day is often about thinking how I feel and what I can do. Air pollution adds another burden I could do without,” says EFA’s President Breda Flood.

The “Know your air for health” website primarily seeks to benefit vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women, children, patients and the elderly, because they are most affected by air pollution. The website also encourages patients, the public and health professional groups to make their voice heard with European Union, national and local government authorities on what needs to be done to improve air quality.

Air pollution cuts short the lives of a huge number of Europeans and is a major public health concern in Europe. In 2010 alone, 400,000 people died early due to exposure. In addition, polluted air is the leading environmental cause of cancer deaths, according to the World Health’s Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer. (5) The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) predicts that by 2050 (outdoor) air pollution will be the biggest environmental cause of premature death worldwide. (6)

Despite the overwhelming scientific evidence and the harm done to children and adults from exposure to polluted air, EU air quality standards are much less protective than those recommended by the World Health Organization. “In the next few months, EU decision-makers have a one in a lifetime opportunity to improve

the air we breathe. We hope they will listen to the latest science and the voices of all those citizens affected and decide to opt for greater protection measures”, says Anne Stauffer, HEAL’s Deputy Director. (7, 8)

By providing information on the overwhelming range of conditions that are linked to air pollution, and by highlighting regulatory opportunities, HEAL and EFA aim to help improve public health through support for stronger air quality policies in Europe.

What you can do

- Browse the website to find out how your health is affected by air pollution (information is available in [English](#), [Italian](#) and [German](#))
- Check for tips on how to avoid air pollution and what you can do to help reduce it
- Send a letter to your Member of the European Parliament and national minister and urge them to support air quality measures
- Follow us on Twitter **from today** [@HealthandEnv](#) and [@EFA_Patients](#) – **we're tweeting:** "World Asthma Day – Know your air for health website says cleaning up the air can help us all breathe more easily" [#asthma](#) [#air](#) [#pollution](#) [#healthierair](#) [#airwebreathe](#)

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References

- (1) See <http://knowyourairforhealth.eu/> Information about HEAL and EFA is below these references.
- (2) <http://knowyourairforhealth.eu/spip.php?rubrique39>
- (3) European Respiratory Society: 'The European Lung White Book – Respiratory health and disease in Europe', 2013 <http://www.erswhitebook.org/>
- (4) Results of the EU APHEKOM research project: <http://www.aphekom.org/> and EFA 'Fighting for breath', 2004: http://www.efanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Fighting_For_Breath1.pdf
- (5) IARC: http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/pr221_E.pdf
- (6) OECD: <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/environmentactnoworfacecostlyconsequenceswarnsoecd.htm>
- (7) Eurobarometer 'Attitudes of Europeans towards air quality', 2013: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_360_en.pdf
- (8) Newly found health effects of air pollution call for stronger EU air policies: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-72_en.htm

HEAL is a leading European not-for-profit organization addressing how the environment affects health in the European Union. With the support of its more than 65 member organizations, which represent health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts, HEAL brings independent expertise and evidence from the health community to different decision-making

processes. Members include international and Europe-wide organisations as well as national and local groups. Website: www.env-health.org Follow us on [Facebook](#) and Twitter (@HealthandEnv)

The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) is a non-profit network of allergy, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) patients organisations, representing 35 national associations in 22 countries and over 400,000 patients. EFA is dedicated to making Europe a place where people with allergies, asthma and COPD have the right to best quality of care and safe environment, live uncompromised lives and are actively involved in all decisions influencing their health. Visit www.efanet.org for more information. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and Twitter (@EFA_Patients).