

# [News story: Public Health England publishes air pollution evidence review](#)

Public Health England (PHE) has today, Monday 11 March 2019, published a [review of evidence on how to improve air quality](#) in the United Kingdom.

The review informs local and national government on actions to improve outdoor air quality and health.

Air pollution is the biggest environmental threat to health in the UK, with between 28,000 and 36,000 deaths a year attributed to long-term exposure. There is strong evidence that air pollution causes the development of coronary heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease and lung cancer, and exacerbates asthma.

Professor Paul Cosford, Director of Health Protection and Medical Director at PHE, said:

Now is our opportunity to create a clean air generation of children, by implementing interventions in a coordinated way. By making new developments clean by design we can create a better environment for everyone, especially our children.

Key interventions local authorities can take include:

- promoting a step change in the uptake of low emission vehicles – by setting more ambitious targets for electric car charging points, as well as encouraging low emission fuels and electric cars
- boosting investment in clean public transport, as well as foot and cycle paths to improve health
- redesigning cities so people aren't so close to highly polluting roads
- discouraging highly polluting vehicles from entering populated areas – for example, with low emission or clean air zones

This work could involve designing wider streets, or considering using hedges to screen against pollutants when planning new infrastructure.

Professor Cosford said:

We recommend that at a local level, any new policy or programme of work which affects air pollution should aim to deliver an overall benefit to the public's health.

So transport and urban planners will need to work together, with others involved in air pollution to ensure that new initiatives

have a positive impact.

Decision makers should carefully design policies, to make sure that the poorest in society are protected against the financial implications of new schemes.

National government policy can support local actions by creating the right incentives. These include policies which promote vehicles with low exhaust emissions or allow controls on industrial emissions in populated areas to take account of health impacts.

## **Background**

Public Health England was commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to review the evidence for effective air quality interventions, and provide practical recommendations for actions to improve air quality.

PHE's review built on the [Air quality plan for nitrogen dioxide \(NO2\) in UK \(2017\)](#) from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department for Transport (DfT).

The review also built on [Air pollution: outdoor air quality and health \(2017\)](#), published by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), which focussed on transport related interventions – to include other pollutants and reviews of interventions in industry, agriculture, transport and planning and behavioural change.

PHE's review supported the development of Defra's final [Clean Air Strategy](#) published in January 2019.

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