



## New Delhi

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### In-car air pollution a health risk

NEW DELHI, APRIL 27. Think twice before you plan to take a long drive next time for a new research shows that spending too much time inside the car can put your health at risk because of the in-car pollutants which can play havoc with your heart and respiratory system.

The research published in American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine points to the fact that prolonged exposure to dirty air inside vehicles could trigger potentially dangerous changes in heart function.

Researchers say that air pollution levels inside cars may increase the risk of heart attack or stroke in people with existing health problems by changing the way the heart functions.

However, health experts here in India say that blaming in-car pollution alone for the phenomenon would be wrong as ultimately it is just a manifestation of increasing air pollution.

"The main difference in the quality of air inside the cars here and in western countries is that in India vast majority of people do not drive air-conditioned cars hence the quality of air is equally bad on both sides", says Dr K Srinath Reddy, Professor and Head of Cardiology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), here.

But then, in case of air conditioned cars too the risk is no less as you are trapping the worst quality of air inside the car and circulating the same polluted air again and again", says Ravi Agarwal, Director, Toxics Link, an environmental NGO.

"Hence it would not be wrong to say that besides the obvious stress and safety-related health challenges present, one cannot rule out that the inside of cars is more toxic than the ambient toxic stew emanating from the tailpipes outside", says Agarwal.

Elaborating about some of the air pollutants usually found inside the car, Agarwal says, "The three main pollutants affecting our health are nitroxide, sulphur dioxide and Respirable Particulate Matter (RSPM). Besides in the car we can witness high quantity of Volatile Organo Chlorines (VOC) or Polychlorinated Aromatic Hydrocarbon (PAH) which are released during combustion of fuel".

Explaining about the possible health threats from these pollutants, Dr Reddy says, "There is lot of evidence that environmental pollutants have an adverse effect on our well

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being. Long time exposure to these pollutants whether inside the car or outside reduces oxidant stress in the body which damages the lining of blood vessels ultimately contributing to heart diseases".

``This disfunctioning of blood vessels can lead to high blood pressure, heart attack apart from chronic respiratory diseases", Dr Reddy says.

``Also long time exposure to pollutants like VOC or PAH can even cause cancer", Agarwal adds.

The study also showed that prolonged exposure to in-car air pollution caused changes, such as increased markers of inflammation and increased blood clotting proteins, variations in heart rate, and other changes in the functioning of the cardiovascular system.

In the study, the researchers monitored the heart rates of troopers of North Carolina State Highway Patrol Cars. Researchers say that troopers were in excellent health and appeared to be at low risk for heart or other health problems. But they found prolonged exposure to air pollution inside the troopers' vehicles prompted changes in the heart rate that could be hazardous on less healthy individuals.

About the way out, experts say that not much can be done unless the air quality is improved.

``First of all people must avoid using 'dirty fuel' in their vehicles. Besides efforts must be made to completely wipe out air conditioners using Chloro Floro Hydrocarbons (CFC), an ozone depleting substance, for cooling the air. Although banned in new model cars people are still using CFC based A/Cs in their cars", Agarwal says, adding air filters should be used in the car to remove pollutants. - PTI

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