

Living in Delhi akin to passive smoking: Expert

Jayashree.Nandi
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Living in Delhi could be like exposing yourself to second-hand smoke from several people all day. C Arden Pope III, Mary Lou Fulton professor of economics at Brigham Young University, told **TOI** in an interview that being exposed to PM 2.5 (fine, respirable particles) of 100 to 150 micrograms per cubic metres constantly was like living in a house where 10-15 packs of cigarettes were smoked every day. On most days throughout the year, Delhi's PM 2.5 levels are more than 100 micrograms per cubic metres.

Since one person usually doesn't smoke that many packs, it could be like passive smoking from five to six people, he said. Pope who spoke at the Indo-US workshop on combating air pollution in north India, said, "In the US, the estimates are that in a home for every pack of cigarette smoked, it increases the exposure

to PM 2.5 levels by 20 micrograms per cubic metres. So 100 to 150 micrograms per cubic metres are more comparable to living in a home where 10 to 15 packs of cigarettes smoked a day," added Pope, who is known for his research on health impacts of air pollution.

He stressed that the health impacts of smoking are definitely more dangerous than

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air pollution. "When you smoke, you expose your lungs to much more fine particles than living in a highly polluted area. But, even very light smoking substantially increases your risk that is also true with air pollution. Impacts of air pollution fall on the entire population. You are talking about everyone being exposed—young children, children with asthma, adults with chronic obstructive pulmonary disorders (COPD), etc."

While most studies in the West are done based on pollu-

tion range there, Pope said no survey had assessed what could be the impact of very severe PM 2.5 levels, such as in India, on health. "I have seen some of the data. Someone from the audience today said PM 2.5 levels shot up to 1,800 micrograms per cubic metres. The truth is we don't understand yet how such levels will impact health. Studies are done on much lower levels, so we don't know how well we can extrapolate from evidence of lower levels up to such higher levels," he said.

Pope called for strategies to deal with air pollution because it affected the "human capital".

Speaking at the workshop, Dr Randeep Guleria of AIIMS said there was clear evidence of hospital visits going up within 48 to 72 hours of a high pollution episode. Many people who come to Delhi with no symptoms start developing respiratory symptoms like chest tightness, wheezing and asthmatic tendency, he said.