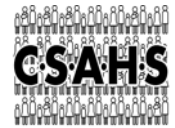


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CENTRAL SYDNEY AREA
HEALTH SERVICE

Air pollution: Is your car making you sick?

A new study published in the April edition of the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia* has found that people in Sydney who commute to work by car are exposed to more air pollution than people who travel by train, bus, bicycle or walking.

The study, conducted by Central Sydney Area Health Service (CSAHS), followed 44 people over a two-week period travelling to work in central Sydney using five different modes of transport. The study compared their exposure to common air pollutants.

Dr Vicky Sheppard of the Environmental Health Branch at NSW Health and co-author of the report, said the study found people who travel by car have at least twice the exposure to air pollutants, such as benzene, while people who travel by train, bus, bicycle or walking have significantly lower exposure levels.

“There are a number of explanations for this including motorists being exposed to a high concentration of pollutants from the exhaust of other cars, as well as direct contamination from their own car,” Dr Sheppard said.

Motorists also have higher levels of exposure to air pollutants such as toluene, ethylbenzene, xylenes and nitrogen dioxide. Exposure to some of these pollutants can result in a range of adverse health effects including, asthma, headaches, eye irritation and cancer, although none of the levels detected in the study were likely to cause immediate effects on health

“The study results highlight the importance of making people more aware about their travel choices and the different levels of pollution they are likely to experience depending on how they choose to get to work,” Dr Sheppard said.

The study found that people who travel by train have the lowest exposure to common air pollutants, suggesting that light and heavy rail should be a public transport preference, particularly over cars.

“We hope to see more government policies, such as *Action for Air* – the NSW Government’s 25-year air quality management plan, that support and encourage the use of public transport and walking and cycling,” Dr Chris Rissel, Director of the Health Promotion Unit, CSAHS and co-author of the report said.

“Not only will these policies preserve our air, land and water; they will also help to reduce people’s exposure to motor vehicle related pollutants and the adverse health risks that inevitably follow,” Dr Rissel said.

According to research conducted by CSIRO Atmospheric Research, mortality due to air pollution in Australia is higher than the road toll. Each year, on average, 2,400 of the 140,000 Australians deaths are linked to air quality and health issues, much more than the 1,700 people who die on our roads. This number increases if long-term effects of air toxics on cancer are included.

While international studies have consistently found that exposure to air pollutants is higher inside cars than outside, this is the first study that compares exposure to air pollution by travel mode focusing on usual travel patterns.

For a complete copy of the study, *Comparison of air pollution exposure for five commuting modes in Sydney – car, train, bus, bicycle and walking*, visit www.healthpromotion.org.au. This study was funded by the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority.

Dr Vicky Sheppard and Dr Chris Rissel are available for interviews on request.

ENDS

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Supporting information

Study on the *Comparison of air pollution exposure for five commuting modes in Sydney – car, train, bus, bicycle and walking.*

Relative BTEX concentrations across modes with “Train” mode as baseline

