

To:
All London GP Practices
All London NHS Emergency Departments (*and other UEC settings*)
ICBs: Chief Medical Officer, Chief Nursing Officer
Acute Trusts: Chief Medical Officer, Chief Nursing Officer

Wednesday 28 February 2024

Dear colleagues,

Air Quality Alerts for General Practice and Emergency Departments in London

We are writing to inform you of the launch of new air quality alerts for health and care professionals in London, which – during this initial phase – will deliver alerts to all General Practices (GPs) and Emergency Departments (ED) in London. This letter provides more information on the development of the alerts and what they mean for GPs and ED staff.

What are the new air quality alerts?

The [London Air Quality and Health Programme Office](#) has collaborated with a wide range of partners across London's health and care system and the Mayor of London to develop the UK's first targeted air quality alerts for health professionals in London.

The air quality alert will be delivered directly to GPs and EDs the day before an episode of high or very high air pollution is forecast. It builds upon the Mayor of London's existing air quality alert system which currently delivers alerts to schools and other London stakeholders. The alerts are triggered by forecasts from Imperial College London.

The air quality alerts for GPs and EDs will be issued jointly by NHSE London and the Mayor of London and will be disseminated via email by the London Regional Operations Centre. The alerts will provide:

- Clear, evidence-based guidance to support person-centred conversations with patients and carers.
- Advice on how to reduce exposure and contribution to air pollution.

The development of the air quality alerts has been informed by the best available evidence and extensive engagement with a broad range of stakeholders and experts, including academics, clinical networks, third sector partners, behavioural scientists, ethicists, and clinicians.

An example of the alert messaging is included at Appendix 1.

Why are we introducing air quality alerts for health professionals?

In the UK, air pollution is the largest environmental risk to public health. The Chief Medical Officer (CMO)'s 2022 [Annual Report](#) on air pollution highlights that air pollution affects people's health throughout their lives, from before birth to old age. London has the highest mortality burden attributable to air pollution of any English region and London's most vulnerable citizens are disproportionately impacted.

Health harms come from long-term exposure to air pollution (over years or lifetime) and short-term exposure to elevated levels of air pollution. Short-term exposure (over hours or days) to elevated

levels can also cause a range of health impacts, including effects on lung function, exacerbation of asthma, increases in respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions and mortality.

There are several ways to help reduce the risk of ill health, disease, and premature death. As health professionals, you have a powerful role to play in educating and protecting your patients against the negative effects of air pollution. The need to support health professionals to strengthen this role was highlighted in the [Coroner's Prevention of Future Deaths Report](#) following the inquest into the death of 9-year-old Londoner Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah who was the first person to have air pollution listed as a cause of death, and in the CMO's 2022 [Annual Report](#) on air pollution.

These new alerts will help to raise awareness of air pollution and the associated health effects among health professionals and equip you with the information you need to advise and support your patients and carers and to help reduce the burden of preventable harm.

How many alerts do we expect to issue each year?

We anticipate that alerts will be triggered four to five times a year.

What are we asking you to do?

- Familiarise yourself with the content of the alert in Appendix 1 and consider how you could incorporate this guidance and advice into practice.
- Visit [Global Action Plan's Clean Air Hub](#) for training videos for health professionals and for downloadable information and resources that you can share with patients and display in your practice or department.
- Discuss air pollution and these new alerts in your team or practice meetings.

Who do I contact if I have any questions or feedback?

We welcome feedback on these alerts. Please contact aq.programmeoffice@ukhsa.gov.uk with any suggestions or queries.

Thank you very much for your support.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Chris Streater

Regional Medical Director and Chief
Clinical Information Officer

NHS England London



Professor Kevin Fenton CBE

Regional Director, Office for Health
Improvement and Disparities (London)

Regional Director of Public Health, NHS
England London

Statutory Health Advisor to the Mayor
of London, GLA and London Assembly

Air Quality Alerts to Healthcare Professionals

EMAIL SUBJECT: Probable High Air Pollution Alert for Healthcare Professionals

This email is for information

Probable High pollution has been forecast for London for [day & date here]

Exposure to high air pollution may induce symptoms such as wheezing, shortness of breath, exacerbations of asthma and COPD, and other symptoms. These symptoms could appear within hours of exposure or several days later.

Key clinical messages

In future, consider having conversations with your patients about how air pollution could impact them, and any steps they can take to reduce their risk of harm. This can be done routinely as part of long-term condition management, so patients learn how to self-manage:

- Remind patients to continue to follow their asthma/COPD plans, take their preventer inhaler or controller medications as prescribed, carry their reliever inhaler and to arrange a review after every exacerbation.
- People can continue physical activity during air pollution episodes. [Children do not need to be kept from school or prevented from taking part in games.](#)
- However, during high air pollution episodes, older people, and those with cardiac or respiratory conditions **may** need to reduce vigorous physical activity, particularly if they experience symptoms.

Additional steps patients can take to reduce their exposure and contribution to air pollution

- Walk, cycle and scoot more, and avoid the busiest roads and times when you can.
- Use public transport where you can, but if you do have to drive, switch your engine off when you're stationary.
- Avoid unnecessary burning at home (e.g. in a wood burning stove or open fire) unless it is your only source of heat.

Background information

- Air pollution can affect everyone, but people with cardiac or respiratory disease, older people, children and pregnant people are at greater risk of health impacts.
- There is no safe level of air pollution. The [Chief Medical Officer's annual report 2022](#) highlights that long-term exposure to low levels of pollution are harmful to health.

Visit [Global Action Plan's Clean Air Hub](#) for information & leaflets to share with patients throughout the year.

If you have questions or feedback about this alert, please contact:

AQ.programmeoffice@ukhsa.gov.uk

Issued by: NHS England-London and the Mayor of London

The Mayor of London's air pollution alerts are based on data from Imperial College London Air Quality Forecast Service