

# COVID-19 incidence, mortality linked to air pollution status, say experts

**STAFF REPORTER**  
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There is worldwide evidence that both COVID-19 incidence and mortality are linked to the air pollution status of a place/people, said Arvind Kumar, chairman, Institute of Chest Surgery and founder and managing trustee, Lung Care Foundation.

Speaking on Thursday, the first of the two-day India Clean Air Summit (ICAS 2021) organised by the Centre for Air Pollution Studies (CAPS) at the Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), he said the linkages between air pollution and COVID-19 had been at the forefront of dis-

cussions from the beginning of the pandemic.

“Air pollution is a national health emergency today. Earlier, only about 5% of my lung cancer patients were non-smokers, now almost 50% of them are non-smokers. However, everybody in India is a smoker today, including newborn babies, because they are breathing in polluted air. We need more awareness on this. Only then can there be awakening and action,” he said.

He also termed “smog towers” a “colossal waste of public money”, and said whatever money was spent on towers needed to be spent on preventing air pol-

lution. Daniel S. Greenbaum, president, Health Effects Institute, said the seasonal nature of the air-pollution problem is particularly intense. “It lets people think it is over and the political will slows down. These are not simple decisions. We need to identify the sources which have the greatest impact, in terms of not just air pollution, but its health effects,” he added.

Almost 6% of global deaths are due to outdoor air pollution. India is in the range of 8-10%, and increasing.

This is a cause of concern. While many countries are making progress on this front, we are not, said

Vivekanand Jha, Executive Director, The George Institute for Global Health India, said: “The COVID-19 pandemic has made citizens aware of health --- more than ever before. With vaccinations, COVID-19 might be controlled, but air pollution is still a major threat.”

“My fear is that once the pandemic situation improves, we will go back to our old ways, even more so because economic activity is so depressed, people are desperate to get back on track. Unless we present people with better alternatives, they will be going back to their old ways, once things become better,” he added.