

# EU study finds exposure to even low levels of air pollution during pregnancy increases risk of lower birthweight babies

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Exposure to common air pollutants and traffic during pregnancy significantly increases the risk of restricted fetal growth, even at levels well below those stipulated in current European Union air-quality directives, according to one of the largest studies of its kind, published in *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*.

The researchers estimate that for every increase of 5 micrograms per cubic metre ( $5\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) in exposure to fine [particulate matter](#) during pregnancy, found in for example traffic fumes and industrial air pollutants, the risk of low birthweight at term rises by 18%. Importantly, this increased risk persists at levels below the existing EU annual [air quality](#) limit of  $25\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ .

"Our findings suggest that a substantial proportion of cases of low birthweight at term could be prevented in Europe if urban air pollution, particularly fine particulate matter, was reduced", explains lead author Dr Marie Pedersen from the Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology in Barcelona, Spain.

Pedersen was part of a team of European researchers coordinated by CREAL (Barcelona) and INSERM (Grenoble) to assess the impact of exposure to low levels of air pollution during pregnancy on low birthweight at term (

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