

Air pollution triggers asthma?

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New Delhi: Higher air pollution levels in Urban India may be a major threat to a large population of children and adults as it triggers pulmonary diseases such as asthma, warn experts on World Asthma Day.

The Global Initiative on Asthma has selected "You Can Control Asthma" as the theme for this year.

According to estimations from the 2011 population census, the asthma burden of India is between 17 and 30 million. According to rough estimates, a prevalence of between 10 and 15 per cent is present in 5-11 year old children in the country.

Dr. Arun Nair, Chief of Interventional Pulmonary Medicine at Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre in Kochi, said that asthma is not curable but it can be treated effectively in a majority of cases owing to the advances in therapy.



Dr. Nair also said that around 75 per cent of patients with asthma do not know the right use of inhalers. This exposes them to infections to voice cords and oral infections. Asthma has genetic elements and may run in families. However, often no familial pattern is seen in some patients. Allergy

is also a causative factor for development of asthma but several patients develop the disease without having an allergy.

Dr. Nair informed that inhaled steroids are still the best option for treatment for asthma. In most of the cases, asthma can be controlled on mild to moderate inhaled steroid doses. These have a good safety profile. Systemic side-effects occur owing to absorption of inhaled steroids into blood stream and mostly negligible at low to medium doses.

The recent advances made in the field of asthma allow combination drugs to be given to the patients once a day. Soon these drugs will be available in India. Other than this, there are drugs which block

the allergy causing antibodies. These can be used in carefully selected allergic asthma patients who do not have effective control regardless of being given maximum inhaled treatment. There are interventions which can be delivered via bronchoscope (thermoplasty) for treatment of selected patients in the west.

It is easy to control asthma. However, a number of people die in India owing to the disease because of misguided beliefs, lack of awareness and poor access to healthcare facilities.