

**June 5 – World Environment Day**

**At least 21,000 deaths per year in Spain are caused by exposure to environmental pollutants**

*David Rojas, researcher at the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal), highlights that all these deaths are “avoidable”*

Exposure to environmental pollutants causes at least 21,000 deaths every year in Spain, of which at least 15,000 can be attributed to air pollution. These data come from the latest [Global Burden of Disease \(GBD\) study](#), in which the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal), an institution supported by the “la Caixa” Foundation, has participated.

ISGlobal researcher David Rojas, who has participated in the study, calls it an “unacceptable” situation. “It must be noted that the study considered only those risk factors for which there is a proven causality, and for which data are available in 195 countries analysed, so these are conservative estimates,” he points out. “In any case, the real tragedy is that these deaths should not be occurring in the first place, since we know the causes and they could be avoided with decisive actions to reduce pollution”, he adds.

The only pollutants included in this study were particulate matter, ozone, lead and radon, while noise, nitrous oxides (NOx), UVA rays or pesticides were not considered.

On the basis of these data, it is estimated that environmental factors account for 5% of the disease burden in Spain compared to 6% for the European Union, while the worldwide average environmental burden rises to 13%.

As observed in previous editions of the study, the environmental exposure that poses the greatest global risk to health is air pollution by particulate matter. In Spain, motor vehicles represent the main source of this type of pollutant. Globally, particulate matter is estimated to cause more than 4.2 million deaths every year and lead to the loss of more than 167 million years of healthy life, measured as disability-adjusted life years (DALYs). In fact, the last decade has seen a 7.8% increase in the global mortality attributed to particulate matter, to which the steep population growth has greatly contributed.

In the context of World Environment Day, celebrated on June 5, Dr. Rojas asserts: “A greater involvement of authorities and the citizens themselves is key to reducing our pollution emission levels, especially those of particulate matter. Authorities must promote an urban design that improves public health, while the general population can play a decisive role by choosing its mode of transport”.

Launched in the 1990s, the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study has been collecting and analysing data on premature mortality and disability in 195 countries, over the last 25 years. It comprises a consortium of 2,300 researchers from across the world, and its latest edition uses data from 2015 that are fully relevant today.

## Reference

Forouzanfar, Mohammad H et al. Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 79 behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks, 1990–2015: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2015. *The Lancet*. 2016 Oct 8;388(10053):1659-1724. [doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)31679-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31679-8).

## About ISGlobal

The Barcelona Institute for Global Health, ISGlobal, is the fruit of an innovative alliance between the "la Caixa" Foundation and academic and government institutions to contribute to the efforts undertaken by the international community to address the challenges in global health. ISGlobal is a consolidated hub of excellence in research that has grown out of work first started in the world of health care by the Hospital Clínic and the Parc de Salut MAR and in the academic sphere by the University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University. The pivotal mechanism of its work model is the transfer of knowledge generated by scientific research to practice, a task undertaken by the institute's Education and Policy and Global Development departments. ISGlobal a member of the CERCA programme of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

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