



Protect Your Baby From Harmful Air Pollution

Important Health Information for Pregnant Women and Mothers of Young Children in South Africa

"My grandson was affected the most by the air pollution. He was not able to play with his friends from a very young age and he was always short of breath. He just couldn't run and play or even play with a ball. We had to rush him to Wentworth Hospital one day."

Why You Should Be Concerned:

Air pollution is a serious health risk — especially for unborn babies and infants.

Breathing polluted air during pregnancy can increase the risk of low birth weight, premature birth, developmental delays, and in severe cases even miscarriage or stillbirth. Infants exposed to polluted air are more likely to develop asthma and other lung diseases, infections like pneumonia and have poor brain development and learning challenges.

Polluted air can enter your lungs and bloodstream — and reach your unborn baby too.

Did You Know?

Many parts of South Africa — including areas near mines, power stations, busy roads, and informal settlements — have high levels of harmful air pollutants.

How Air Pollution Affects Mothers and Babies

Common sources of harmful air in South Africa are smoke from cooking with wood, coal, or paraffin indoors, vehicle exhaust fumes, especially taxis and trucks in urban areas, industrial emissions from factories and power stations, burning waste and veld fires and dust from unpaved roads and mining activities.

What You Can Do to Protect Yourself and Your Baby:

Simple steps you can take:

At Home:

- Use clean cooking fuels (like LPG, electricity, or solar stoves) if possible.
- Cook outside or ensure proper ventilation when using a coal or wood stove indoors.
- Use the 'basa njengo magogo' way of lighting a fire.
- Avoid burning waste near homes.
- Keep windows closed during nearby outdoor burning or high traffic.

When you are outside:

- Avoid walking along busy roads with lots of traffic, especially during rush hour.
- Wear a cloth mask or scarf if exposed to dust or smoke.
- Use a baby wrap or pram cover to help protect infants from visible smoke or dust.

For your health and your baby's health:

- Attend all your antenatal clinic appointments.
- Report breathing problems or coughs in you or your baby to a health worker.
- Ask your clinic about vitamin supplements and vaccines that can help protect your baby's lungs.



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What to do if your child has asthma and you live in a polluted area?

1. Medical Management

- Work with a doctor: Ensure your child has an asthma action plan. This includes daily medications (like inhaled corticosteroids) and rescue medication for flare-ups.
- Monitor symptoms: Keep track of coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Use a peak flow meter if advised.
- Get vaccinated: Flu and COVID-19 can worsen asthma — keep vaccinations up to date.

2. Minimise Indoor Air Pollution

- Use air purifiers that help remove fine particles indoors.
- Open windows when air quality is better (usually early mornings or after rain).
- Avoid indoor triggers: No smoking, reduce use of candles/incense, use fragrance-free cleaning products.
- Control allergens: Wash bedding weekly in hot water, reduce dust, mould, and pet dander.

3. Monitor and Respond to Outdoor Air Quality

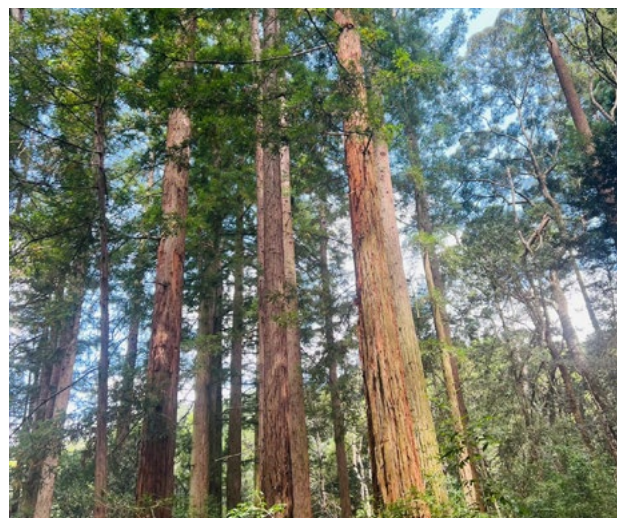
- Check daily air quality: Use apps or websites (e.g., AirQO).
- On bad air quality days:
 - Keep your child indoors if possible.
 - Avoid outdoor exercise, especially near roads.
- Use masks outdoors: N95 masks can help filter fine particles, especially during high-pollution events (like wildfires or dust storms).

4. Advocate and Plan Long-Term

- Talk to schools: Ensure they understand your child's asthma plan and avoid outdoor activities on polluted days.
- Consider relocation if possible: If pollution is chronic and severe, and your child's asthma is poorly controlled despite best efforts, discuss options for moving with healthcare providers or social support services.

Let's work together for clean air and healthy babies!

- Share this information with other mothers and families.
- Speak up about local air pollution with your ward councillor or clinic.
- Join or support community clean air campaigns.



More Information:

- Speak to your nurse or community health worker
- Contact the Department of Health or Environmental Affairs
- Visit: [<https://groundwork.org.za/> (website for GroundWork) and <https://www.health.gov.za/> (NDOH) and <https://www.samrc.ac.za/> (South African Medical Research Council)]



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