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Study Links Slow Lung Growth Rate in Children With Pollution

SACRAMENTO -- A study funded by the California Environmental Protection Agency's Air Resources Board (ARB) has revealed that exposure to high air pollution levels can slow down the lung function growth rate of children by up to 10 percent. The 10-year study is the nation's first large-scale effort to explore the effects of long-term exposure to outdoor air pollution.

"This long-term study shows how important clean air is for the well-being of our children," said Dr. Alan Lloyd, ARB Chairman. "A 10 percent lung function reduction is important because it represents the level at which medical attention may be needed."

In the October issue of the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine, a report on the study's first four years illustrate how nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter and airborne acids affect Southern California children. The project, known as the Children's Health Study, has a team of Southern California researchers, led by Dr. John Peters at USC, tracking the health of more than 3,000 students from fourth to twelfth grade.

At the study's start in 1993, USC researchers selected volunteers from 12 communities within a 200-mile radius of the Los Angeles area. The volunteers consisted of 150 fourth graders, 75 seventh graders, and 75 tenth graders from each community. Each year the children were tested for lung function by measuring how much and how fast they could blow out air. The researchers found that the lung function growth of children who live in smoggier parts of Southern California is lower than those who breathe cleaner air. Children with lower lung function growth are more likely to have chronic respiratory problems in adulthood.

ARB's science advisor Dr. John Holmes states, "Considering the impact pollution has over a child's physical development it becomes even more vital that we take steps to limit their exposure."

The ARB routinely tests air in the 12 communities, from Atascadero in the north to Riverside in the south. These locations were chosen because they exemplify the diversity of pollution levels present in California.

For more information about the Children's Health Study, please contact the ARB's Public Information Office at (916) 322-2990.

The Air Resources Board is a department of the California Environmental Protection Agency. ARB's mission is to promote and protect public health, welfare, and ecological resources through effective reduction of air pollutants while recognizing and considering effects on the economy. The ARB oversees all air pollution control efforts in California to attain and maintain health-based air quality standards.

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