# Dieselgate emissions linked to 16,000 UK deaths and mounting health crisis demand urgent government action



A new analysis reveals the extensive public health fallout from diesel emissions in the UK, attributing 16,000 premature deaths and 30,000 cases of childhood asthma to illegal emissions linked to the infamous 'Dieselgate' scandal. This situation has culminated in staggering health and economic costs, estimated at £96 billion, along with a hefty burden of 800,000 days lost to sickness. The findings, reported by Damian Carrington, underscore a pressing need for government intervention to mitigate these alarming statistics.

Despite the potential for significant regulatory action, the UK government's response has been notably lacklustre compared to its counterparts in the United States. Although authorities have held the legal power to impose fines or enforce vehicle recalls since 2021, substantial investigations into the implicated car models only commenced in 2024. This inaction stands in stark contrast to American measures, which successfully held manufacturers accountable through robust penalties. Consequently, nearly two million consumers in the UK are now poised to take legal action against 18 automotive companies, reflecting a growing frustration among the public regarding corporate accountability for their health impacts.

Experts emphasise that without immediate government action, an estimated 6,000 additional premature deaths may occur. Jamie Kelly from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air noted, “Our calculations reveal the widespread and devastating health impacts of excessive diesel emissions – thousands of lives cut short, countless children developing asthma, and an immense burden of chronic illness.” This sentiment echoes broader findings that vehicle pollution accounts for nearly 19% of new childhood asthma cases annually in the UK, particularly in urban areas such as London and Manchester where nitrogen dioxide emissions are particularly concentrated.

The Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs has previously classified the air quality crisis as a national health emergency, with studies indicating that vehicle emissions contribute to around 40,000 premature deaths in the UK each year. This prompts calls for more ambitious government initiatives, including the possibility of accelerating the proposed 2040 ban on conventional diesel and petrol vehicles to match the 2030 targets of other nations.

The broader implications of diesel pollution resonate even further, with research indicating potential links to metabolic diseases. Notably, the 'Ditch Diesel' campaign—a grassroots initiative led by concerned parents—advocates for urgent reform, calling for the recall of diesel vehicles outfitted with defeat devices and for the establishment of a major fund to combat car-manufacturers' pollution impact. Campaigners argue that transparency and accountability are crucial as they press for stronger regulations to safeguard public health, especially that of vulnerable populations like children.

The shadow of the 'Dieselgate' scandal has loomed large, driven home by the tragic story of Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, the first person in the UK to have air pollution listed as a cause of death. Her case stands as a powerful reminder of the urgent need for effective policy changes aimed at protecting public health from the lurking dangers of vehicle emissions. As new evidence mounts, it is clear that the need for decisive action is more pressing than ever, lest future generations bear the brunt of today's inaction.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.ehn.org/dieselgate-linked-vehicle-pollution-blamed-for-thousands-of-uk-deaths-and-child-asthma-cases), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/10/vehicle-pollution-results-in-4m-child-asthma-cases-a-year)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.ehn.org/dieselgate-linked-vehicle-pollution-blamed-for-thousands-of-uk-deaths-and-child-asthma-cases), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/mar/15/uk-car-industry-must-pay-up-for-toxic-air-catastrophe-super-inquiry-finds), [[4]](https://www.euractiv.com/section/transport/news/scientists-link-dieselgate-to-5000-premature-deaths-per-year-in-europe/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.mumsforlungs.org/our-campaigns/ditch-diesel), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/sep/22/invisible-killer-how-one-girls-tragic-death-could-change-the-air-pollution-story), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/asthma-traffic-air-pollution-child-uk-nitrogen-dioxide-a8864466.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ehn.org/dieselgate-linked-vehicle-pollution-blamed-for-thousands-of-uk-deaths-and-child-asthma-cases> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/10/vehicle-pollution-results-in-4m-child-asthma-cases-a-year> - A study published in The Guardian highlights that vehicle pollution is responsible for approximately 4 million new childhood asthma cases annually worldwide. The research indicates that nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), primarily emitted by diesel vehicles, is a significant contributor to these cases. In the UK, the study estimates that 19% of new childhood asthma cases each year are attributable to NO₂ pollution, with higher percentages in cities like Manchester and London. The findings underscore the urgent need for policy initiatives to reduce traffic-related air pollution to protect children's health.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/mar/15/uk-car-industry-must-pay-up-for-toxic-air-catastrophe-super-inquiry-finds> - An inquiry by UK MPs has described the air pollution caused by diesel vehicles as a 'national health emergency,' leading to 40,000 premature deaths annually. The MPs criticized the government's clean air plans as 'woefully inadequate' and called for a more ambitious approach, including bringing forward the 2040 ban on conventional diesel and petrol cars to match other nations' 2030 targets. The inquiry emphasizes the need for bold, meaningful action to address the toxic air crisis and protect public health.
4. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/transport/news/scientists-link-dieselgate-to-5000-premature-deaths-per-year-in-europe/> - A study published in Environmental Research Letters estimates that emissions from diesel cars equipped with defeat devices, as revealed in the 'Dieselgate' scandal, may be responsible for 5,000 additional premature deaths annually in Europe. This research aligns with previous assessments of deaths due to the scandal, highlighting the significant public health impact of excess emissions from diesel vehicles. The study underscores the need for stringent regulatory actions to mitigate the health risks associated with diesel vehicle pollution.
5. <https://www.mumsforlungs.org/our-campaigns/ditch-diesel> - The 'Ditch Diesel' campaign by Mums for Lungs advocates for the immediate recall of diesel vehicles equipped with defeat devices and calls for a major UK fund of at least £1 billion to address the impact of air pollution caused by car manufacturers. The campaign emphasizes the need for transparency regarding vehicle emissions and urges both national and local governments to accelerate the phase-out of diesel vehicles to protect public health, particularly that of children.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/sep/22/invisible-killer-how-one-girls-tragic-death-could-change-the-air-pollution-story> - The Guardian article discusses the tragic case of Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, a nine-year-old girl whose death in 2013 was linked to air pollution, marking the first time air pollution was listed as a cause of death in the UK. The article highlights the broader implications of the 'Dieselgate' scandal, which exposed the manipulation of emissions data by car manufacturers, and the subsequent decline in diesel vehicle sales. It underscores the need for policy changes to address the health impacts of diesel emissions.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/asthma-traffic-air-pollution-child-uk-nitrogen-dioxide-a8864466.html> - Research reported by The Independent suggests that one in five new childhood asthma cases in the UK could be linked to traffic pollution. The study estimates that 19% of new childhood asthma cases annually in the UK are attributable to nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution, with higher percentages in cities like Manchester and London. The findings highlight the significant health risks associated with vehicle emissions and the need for effective policy measures to reduce air pollution and protect children's health.