# Illegal diesel emissions linked to 16,000 UK deaths and surge in childhood asthma, report warns



A recent analysis highlights a grim reality: illegal emissions from diesel vehicles in the UK have been linked to an estimated 16,000 premature deaths and over 30,000 childhood asthma cases. This troubling data emerges from an investigation into the extensive impacts of diesel pollution, largely attributed to defeat devices that allow vehicles to exceed legal emissions limits, resulting in significant public health and economic costs estimated at £96 billion.

Damian Carrington reported in The Guardian that diesel emissions have not only imposed a heavy toll in terms of health but also accounted for 800,000 days of sick leave across the UK workforce. Alarmingly, experts predict that without immediate government intervention, an additional 6,000 lives could be lost due to this ongoing crisis. Jamie Kelly from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air poignantly stated, “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.”

The Dieselgate scandal has left a lasting legacy of public health concerns, particularly as nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter emitted by diesel vehicles are closely linked to severe respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Vulnerable populations, especially children, are at a heightened risk, experiencing not only asthma and impaired lung development but also potential cognitive issues. Disturbingly, around 2,091 schools and nurseries are situated within 150 metres of roads with illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide, underscoring the urgent need for rigorous environmental regulations and cleaner transportation alternatives.

While nations such as the United States have aggressively pursued accountability through fines and recalls, the UK government’s response has been markedly tepid. Despite holding the legal authority to instigate regulatory action since 2021, investigations into 47 car models were only launched in 2024, leaving many toxic vehicles on the road. This lack of enforcement is particularly alarming considering that illegal diesel vehicles are responsible for nearly 40% of all nitrogen oxide emissions in the UK. Such vehicles, frequently outfitted with defeat devices, exacerbate air pollution and the associated health risks.

The issue further extends beyond immediate emissions; research conducted by the University of York has identified previously unrecognized pollutants in London’s air, including unburned diesel hydrocarbons, which contribute to harmful ozone and particulate matter formation. Additionally, past revelations spotlighted attempts by the UK government to resist tougher EU car emissions tests, potentially allowing for higher pollutant outputs. This contentious stance drew criticism from environmental groups advocating for stricter emissions standards to safeguard public health.

As nearly two million UK consumers embark on legal action against 18 automakers, the spotlight is firmly placed on the government's next steps. Experts warn of the dire health implications tied to the continued presence of high-emission diesel vehicles, stressing that urgent regulatory reform is essential to avert further loss of life and improve air quality. The enduring impacts of Dieselgate have evolved into a pressing public health crisis that necessitates an immediate and robust response from authorities to protect vulnerable citizens and ensure cleaner air for future generations.

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/2017/apr/04/thousands-of-british-children-exposed-to-illegal-levels-of-air-pollution> - An investigation revealed that thousands of British children are exposed to illegal levels of air pollution, particularly from diesel vehicles. The study found that 2,091 schools and nurseries are within 150 metres of roads emitting illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). This exposure is linked to respiratory issues and premature deaths, with air pollution contributing to approximately 29,000 deaths annually in the UK. The findings highlight the urgent need for stricter regulations and cleaner transportation options to protect public health.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/sep/26/uk-tried-to-block-tougher-eu-car-emissions-tests> - Documents revealed that the UK government attempted to block tougher EU car emissions tests, potentially allowing diesel vehicles to emit higher levels of pollutants. This move could have undermined efforts to reduce air pollution and protect public health. The UK's stance was criticised by environmental groups and other EU member states, who emphasised the need for stricter emissions standards to combat air pollution and its associated health risks.
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4710587/> - A study highlighted the ongoing issue of diesel pollution in Europe, noting that diesel engines emit high levels of nitrogen oxides (NOₓ), contributing to air pollution and associated health problems. The research emphasised the need for stricter emissions standards and better enforcement to mitigate the health impacts of diesel pollution, which include respiratory issues and premature deaths.
5. <https://www.awe.international/article/1908525/illegal-diesel-vehicles-cause-nearly-40-nox-emissions> - A report revealed that illegal diesel vehicles are responsible for nearly 40% of all nitrogen oxide (NOₓ) emissions in the UK. These vehicles, often equipped with defeat devices to cheat emissions tests, contribute significantly to air pollution and associated health risks. The findings underscore the need for stricter enforcement and regulatory action to address the impact of illegal diesel vehicles on public health.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-34347873> - Researchers from the University of York discovered previously unrecognised pollutants from diesel vehicles in London's air. These pollutants, including unburned diesel hydrocarbons, contribute to the formation of ozone and particulate matter, which are harmful to human health. The study highlights the need for more comprehensive monitoring and regulation of diesel emissions to protect public health.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/volkswagen-emissions-scandal-uk-transport-minister-knew-tests-were-being-faked-a-year-ago-a6682431.html> - The Independent reported that UK ministers were aware of discrepancies in diesel vehicle emissions tests up to a year before the Volkswagen emissions scandal was revealed. The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) found that some diesel vehicles emitted seven times the legal limit for nitrogen oxides, leading to significant health risks. The government's delayed response to these findings raised concerns about regulatory oversight and public health protection.