



New study set to find out if air pollution alerts benefit vulnerable people with breathing difficulties



A new study, launched today, will look at how improved public information might reduce the impact of air pollution on the health of vulnerable people, such as those with asthma and other breathing difficulties.



The joint project involves partners from the Sussex Air Quality Partnership, the Environmental Research Group (ERG) at King's College London and St George's, University of London (both members of the MRC-HPA Centre for Environment and Health).



The project will focus on the public health benefits from air pollution alert services that deliver messages to vulnerable people and their carers when high air pollution levels are expected. This targeted information can prompt people to take their medication or avoid air pollution sources, similar to the way to hay-fever sufferers might routinely manage their conditions during the spring and summer.

Such alert systems currently operate across the UK: airAlert (Sussex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Southampton and Seven Oaks (2011); airTEXT (London); and YourAir services (Wakefield and Liverpool). But the effectiveness of the interventions have yet to be determined.

The research will be led by Dr Heather Walton at King's along with scientists from St. Georges, University of London. Dr Walton said: 'Our research is aimed at quantifying, on a theoretical basis, the likely effects of these kind of alerts on people's health. Knowing the potential benefits allows a theoretical assessment of the value for money of these types of services, and the research can also be used to inform the design of any further studies that might be planned to examine effectiveness.'

Dr David Hagen, Health Protection Agency, Surrey & Sussex Health Protection Unit, said: 'The Health Protection Agency has supported airAlert for a number of years. We hope this research will reinforce the positive comments which we regularly receive from sufferers with respiratory problems who have used the service.' -

The research forms part of an overall Sussex Air Quality Partnership (Sussex-air) strategy to assess the effectiveness of systems that alert vulnerable members of the public when levels of air pollution are high, so that they can self-manage their exposure and medication.

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Notes to editor

Sussex Air Quality Partnership (Sussex-air).

Sussex Air Quality Partnership (Sussex-air) is a partnership of air quality specialists and officers from all of the Sussex local, county and unitary authorities, the Surrey and Sussex HPU, the Environment Agency, plus associate members from Brighton and Sussex Universities and Environmental Protection UK.

Sussex-air was one of the first air quality partnerships in the UK (established in 1994). It provides near-real-time air quality information (see www.sussex-air.net), technical and policy assistance on air quality in Sussex. Sussex-air established and operates airAlert (see www.airalert.info) in Sussex and supports other local authorities in establishing their own airAlert services across the UK.



Environmental Research Group (ERG) at King's College London.

King's College London and Guy's and St Thomas', King's College Hospital and South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trusts are part of King's Health Partners. King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre (AHSC) is a pioneering global collaboration between one of the world's leading research-led universities and three of London's most successful NHS Foundation Trusts, including leading teaching hospitals and comprehensive mental health services. For more information, visit: www.kingshealthpartners.org.

The Environmental Research Group (ERG), led by Professor Frank Kelly, is part of the School of Biomedical Science and a leading provider of air quality information and research in the UK. The group combines air pollution science, toxicology and epidemiology to determine the impacts of air pollution on health and works closely with those responsible for air quality management to support policies and actions to minimise air pollution health effects. For more information see <http://www.erg.kcl.ac.uk/>

St George's, University of London.

St George's, University of London, established in 1733, is the UK's only independent medical and healthcare higher education institution. It attracts around 6,000 students in medicine, nursing and other medical professions. The Division of Population Health Sciences and Education undertakes epidemiological research into cardiovascular and respiratory disease and has been involved in research into the health effects of air pollution since the 1990s.

airAlert.

airAlert is an air pollution forecasting and warning service which informs vulnerable people that air pollution is increasing before an event occurs, so that they may manage their conditions appropriately. The service was piloted in Sussex (2006) and developed into a local authority lead service by Sussex Air Quality Partnership and is now available in Sussex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Southampton and Seven Oaks (from 2011) (www.airalert.info).