



EXPOSURE TO AIR POLLUTION CAN MAKE COVID-19 WORSE¹

New research suggests that people exposed to air pollution are more likely to die from COVID-19 than people living in areas with cleaner air. These findings are an ominous sign for developing countries, where air pollution levels often far exceed World Health Organization guidelines. Worse, the air inside people's homes can be magnitudes more polluted than the air they breathe outside.

This is due in large part to how people cook.

- **Globally, almost three billion people** rely on open fires or inefficient stoves to cook their food, filling their homes with dangerous levels of smoke. Exposure is particularly high among women and children, who are more often near the cooking fire or stove.
- **Household air pollution from cooking increases susceptibility** to respiratory infections such as pneumonia and aggravates respiratory illnesses like asthma – which can lead to higher mortality rates after a COVID-19 infection.
- **Effective social distancing can be a significant challenge** in countries with informal job markets or overcrowded urban areas. Families may have to choose between risking increased exposure to the virus – including to collect fuel – and foregoing critical income.
- **The current economic slowdown could cause a return to firewood** or other polluting cooking methods for households that use cleaner cooking fuels, due to loss of income or disruptions in fuel supply chains.

There are proven methods to boost access to clean cooking, which can be incorporated into broader containment and response efforts.

Governments must make clean cooking part of their pandemic emergency response plans.

- India is giving away millions of cooking gas cylinders to those in need. Ghana is subsidizing electricity costs for three months for the poor. Other governments should follow their lead, while ensuring clean cooking fuel providers are supported with the resources needed to minimize supply chain disruptions.

Governments must not allow short-term responses to undermine long-term health goals.

- Clean cooking solutions are critical to reducing household air pollution and building people's longstanding resilience to respiratory illnesses.

Donors, developed-country governments, and multilateral organizations must provide critical support.

- Developing countries are going to need strong support. Many organizations and governments are already stepping up, including the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom, the WHO, and the World Bank. This must continue, and where



Credit: Reuters

possible be expanded. New donors must join their efforts to address the household air pollution crisis. This issue is now more critical than ever.

Public and private capital providers can help increase long-term access to clean cooking.

- Many clean cooking businesses are pioneering scalable business models and high impact technologies but are at a pivotal stage of development. Impact investors must urgently offer the financial resources to ensure businesses' sustainability and ability to provide a growing market with modern cooking solutions.

For more information, please visit the Alliance's COVID-19 Resource Page at www.CleanCookingAlliance.org/covid19.html



¹ Xiao Wu and Rachel C. Nethery. "COVID-19 PM2.5: A national study on long-term exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States." Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (5 April 2020)

² Moses Odhiambo. "Gas and bread to go up in Covid-19 tax proposal." The Star Kenya (3 April 2020)

³ "Ujjwala beneficiaries to get 3 free cylinders till June." The Economic Times (26 March 2020)

⁴ Ellen Dapaah. "COVID-19: Government to absorb electricity bills for the poor, others to enjoy 50% slash." Citi Newsroom (9 April 2020)

About the Clean Cooking Alliance

The Clean Cooking Alliance works with a global network of partners to build an inclusive industry that makes clean cooking accessible to the three billion people who live each day without it. Established in 2010, the Alliance is driving consumer demand, mobilizing investment to build a pipeline of scalable businesses, and fostering an enabling environment that allows the sector to thrive. Clean cooking transforms lives by improving health, protecting the climate and the environment, empowering women, and helping consumers save time and money. Learn more about our work at www.CleanCookingAlliance.org.

