

Air pollution linked to higher risk of dementia

Paris: Urban air pollution, mostly from vehicles, is associated with an increased risk of dementia, according to research published on Wednesday. The link remained even after heavy drinking, smoking and other well established risk factors for dementia were ruled out, the researchers reported in medical journal *BMJ Open*.

Worldwide, about 7% of people over 65 suffer from Alzheimer's or some form of dementia, a percentage that rises to 40% above the age of 85. The number afflicted worldwide is expected to nearly triple by 2050, posing a huge challenge to healthcare systems.

"Primary prevention of all dementia is a major global public health concern for the coming decades," the researchers wrote.

Chemicals cast off by tailpipe pollution such as nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and soot are known to boost the risk for heart disease, stroke and respiratory problems, especially asthma.

But whether they also make Alzheimer's and other kinds of dementia more likely has remained unclear.

To find out more, a team of researchers led by Iain Carey of the University of London's Population Health Research Institute combed through health records for 131,000 people living in Greater London who, in 2004, we-

Smoking can affect vision too

Exposure to a chemical in tobacco smoke could make it more difficult for people to see in low-contrast conditions, such as low light, fog or glare, a new study suggests. Researchers found that higher levels of cadmium in the blood were associated with diminished contrast sensitivity, they report in *JAMA Ophthalmology*. "This particular aspect of vision is really important because it affects your ability to see the end of a curb or put a key into a lock in low light," said lead author Adam Paulson of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, School of Medicine. **REUTERS**

re aged 50 to 79. None showed signs of dementia when the study began.

Based on residential addresses, the scientists estimated yearly exposure to both NO₂ and fine particulates known as PM_{2.5}, and then tracked the health of the participants over a seven-year period. During that time, nearly 2,200 patients — 1.7% of the total — were diagnosed with dementia. The fifth of these patients living in the most heavily polluted areas were 40% more likely to be afflicted than the fifth residing in areas with the least NO₂ and PM_{2.5}. **AFP**