

# Climate change boosts deadly smog

Buildings are engulfed by heavy smog in Urumqi. [Photo/Chinanews.com]

Global warming has boosted the frequency and severity of deadly air pollution peaks in northern China, according to a report in the Nature Climate Change journal.

“Climate change increases occurrences of weather conditions conducive to Beijing winter severe haze,” scientists involved in the research said.

In the capital and other major northern cities, the number of days each year with weather tailor-made for extreme smog rose from 45 to 50 in the period 1982-2015 compared to the previous three decades, a 10 percent jump, their study found.

The trend is set to worsen if warming continues unabated.

Persistent episodes of health-wrecking haze would become another 50 percent more frequent – and last nearly twice as long – during the second half of this century, the scientists found.

The main danger, experts agree, is particle pollution, especially toxic, microscopic flecks smaller than 2.5 micrometers in diameter – about 40 times thinner than a human hair.

The burning of coal, along with vehicle emissions and dust, are the main sources of these ultra-fine specks, which can cause severe respiratory problems and increase the risk of heart disease.

Small enough to enter human cells, they can also affect the immune and nervous systems.

In major cities across northern China, the number of days with “severe haze” jumped from 12 to 18 to 25 during the winters of 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively.

Severe haze days happen when the concentration of small particles exceeds 150 micrograms per cubic meter of air.

In January this year, a thick blanket of haze settled over the Beijing-Tianjin basin – home to more than 100 million people – for eight consecutive days.

For several days running, the density of particles 2.5 micrometers or less was higher than 500 micrograms per cubic meter, more than three times the World Health Organization’s danger threshold.

“I would rank air pollution as the No. 1 or No. 2 concern of ordinary people in northern cities in China,” said co-author Liao Hong, a researcher at Nanjing University’s School of Environmental Science and Engineering.

A report by China's environment ministry last year showed that 265 of the country's 338 biggest cities failed to meet new health standards for small-particle pollution in 2015.

The perfect storm of geographic and weather conditions that favor lung-searing smog include sharp temperature differences between the lower and upper atmosphere, faint winds, and certain patterns of atmospheric flow.

The researchers, led by Cai Wenju of the Qingdao National Laboratory for Marine Science and Technology, combined these elements to create a "haze weather index" that they matched against 60 years of weather records.

Averaging across 15 climate models, they also calculated a sharp increase in the number of smog-inducing days from 2050 to 2100.

"In spite of stringent emission controls, severe haze days in Beijing have continued to increase, as clearly seen over the past three winters," said Zhang Renhe, a researcher at Fudan University. "A global effort to slow down global warming is also urgently needed to decrease the risk of heavy air pollution in Beijing."

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## **Strict compliance of 'Flag Code of India, 2002' and 'The Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971'**

The Ministry of Home Affairs has issued an Advisory to the Chief Secretaries/Administrators of all State Governments/UT Administrations,

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## **I&B Minister meets Ethiopian Communication Affairs Minister**

India and Ethiopia have agreed to strengthen the cooperation in critical areas related to communication and outreach. The cooperation would be worked out through a policy and institutional framework in the various domains

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# Press release: Justice Secretary announces plans to create 5,000 modern prison places

- New builds to create up to 2,000 construction jobs and generate millions of pounds to British economy
- Builds on the government's commitment to create up to 10,000 modern places, aimed at reducing overcrowding and creating the right conditions for reform.

Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss has today unveiled plans for the building of 4 new prisons in England and Wales – creating 5,000 modern prison places and replacing old and overcrowded establishments with new, fit for purpose buildings.

Sites in Full Sutton in Yorkshire; Hindley in Wigan; Rochester in Kent and Port Talbot in South Wales have been earmarked for development as part of the government's commitment to build up to 10,000 modern prison places by 2020, backed by £1.3 billion to transform the estate.

As well as creating modern establishments fit for the twenty-first century, the proposed new builds will also act as a boost to regional economies across the country – creating up to 2,000 jobs in the construction and manufacturing industries and new opportunities for local businesses.

Final decisions on the new prisons will be subject to planning approvals, as well as value for money and affordability.

Justice Secretary Elizabeth Truss said:

We cannot hope to reduce reoffending until we build prisons that are places of reform where hard work and self-improvement flourish.

Outdated prisons, with dark corridors and cramped conditions, will not help offenders turn their back on crime – nor do they provide our professional and dedicated prison officers with the right tools or environment to do their job effectively.

This significant building programme will not only help create a modern prison estate where wholesale reform can truly take root, but will also provide a thriving, economic lifeline for the local community – creating hundreds of jobs for local people and maximising opportunities for businesses.

Today's announcement comes weeks after the opening of HMP Berwyn – the new, modern prison in north Wales which will hold over 2,000 prisoners. The construction of this new prison has already contributed over £100 million to

the local economy and created around 150 jobs and apprenticeships before doors have even opened.

In creating a modern prison estate, old and inefficient prisons will be closed and replaced by the new accommodation. A programme of valuation work will now begin to help inform further decisions about the estate. Announcements on prison closures will be made later in the year.

Today's announcement builds on ambitious reforms to improve safety in prisons, including an additional £100 million to bolster frontline staff by 2,500.

This wholesale, organisational reform will be supported by measures within the Prisons and Court Bill, which will set out a new framework and clear system of accountability for prisons, building on the wide-ranging reforms set out in the Prison Safety and Reform White Paper.

1. We will be applying for outline planning permission for new prisons in Yorkshire, the North West, Kent and South Wales.
2. A Written Ministerial Statement detailing further information will be published at 0930 Wednesday 22 March.

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## **News story: UK families will soon see bills cut as date announced for the launch of Tax-Free Childcare**

Millions of parents can pre-register from today for the government's new childcare offers, with the launch of a new Childcare Choices government [website](#).

The introduction of the government's Tax-Free Childcare scheme will begin on 28 April, for parents of the youngest children. It will be gradually rolled out over 2017 – cutting childcare costs for working families across the UK by up to £2,000 per child per year, or £4,000 for disabled children.

On top of this, from September this year parents of three and four year old children living in England will be able to apply for a new 30 hours free childcare offer, worth around £5,000 per child.

The Childcare Choices website includes a [Childcare Calculator](#) for parents to compare all the government's childcare offers and check what works best for their families.

Through the site parents can also pre-register for email alerts that will notify them when they can apply, as well as providing details of existing

government childcare offers.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury, David Gauke, said:

This Government is on the side of working families and our childcare support will cut thousands of pounds off bills for millions of households, as well as supporting parents to return to or remain in work.

The new Childcare Choices website provides busy families with options that suit their needs, so they can clearly see which childcare offer works best for them. For the first time, we have brought all the childcare options together to make the process easier and simpler for families and childcare providers.

Education Secretary, Justine Greening, said:

Affordable childcare and early years education are a vital part of how we can get our children on the right path, whilst also helping parents to be back at work, if that is what they want. Many parents are struggling to balance the cost of childcare against the benefits of being in work and this government wants to help.

From today, parents can use the Childcare Choices website to find out what support is available for their family. Whether that's our 30 hour free childcare offer, Tax-Free Childcare or Universal Credit, the website is a quick and easy way for parents to choose the offer that's best for them and their children.

Two million working families will be eligible for Tax-Free Childcare. It will be gradually rolled out, with parents of children under two invited to enter the scheme first. By the end of the year, all eligible parents will be able to receive government top-ups of £2 for every £8 that a parent pays into their Tax-Free Childcare account. This will be open to all working parents across the UK with children under 12, or under 17 if disabled.

The new 30 hours free childcare offer for working parents of three and four year olds in England doubles the current 15 hours of free childcare currently available, saving eligible working families up to £5,000 a year.

Parents will be able to apply for Tax-Free Childcare and the 30 hours offer in one go through the government's new digital childcare service. Eligible parents can benefit from both Tax-free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare at the same time.

Both of these new offers have been run as trials over recent months, to test the new digital services.

More than 4,000 parents are already benefiting from the 30 hours offer in

eight 'early implementer' councils, with thousands more set to follow suit, as four new areas launch the 30 hours offer in April. And over 2,000 parents are cutting their childcare costs with the Tax-Free Childcare trial.

These offers build on the childcare support already available to thousands of families, including:

- 15 hours free childcare for all three and four year olds
- 15 hours for disadvantaged two year olds
- enhanced childcare support through Universal Credit
- childcare vouchers.

### **How Tax-Free Childcare works**

Working parents will be able to apply, through the childcare service, to open an online childcare account. For every £8 that families or friends pay in, the Government will make a top-up payment of an additional £2, up to a maximum of £2,000 per child per year (or £4,000 for disabled children). This top up is added instantly and parents can then send electronic payments directly to their childcare providers.

All registered childcare providers – whether nannies, nurseries or after school clubs – can sign up online now to receive parents' payments through Tax-Free Childcare. Once childcare providers have signed up they will appear on the [Childcare Provider Checker](#). This allows parents to check whether childcare providers have already signed up for Tax-Free Childcare.

### **How 30 hours free childcare works**

Eligible parents will be able to apply online through the childcare service. They will receive a code – this will allow parents to arrange their childcare place ahead of September 2017. Parents can take their code to their provider or council, along with their National Insurance Number and child's date of birth. Their provider or council will check the code is authentic and allocate them a free childcare place.